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ON ENTERTAINMENT:

THE POLITICS OF VULGARITY

Sam Sprigge

M. Phil

The University of Glasgow

Department of Theatre,
Film and Television

June 2001

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Sam Sprigge

Abstract for M.Phil Thesis

On Entertainment: The Politics of Vulgarity

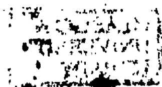
This thesis looks at the cultural field of British "light entertainment", and aims to locate its specificity in relation to its history, its political stance, and its textual strategies. The thesis asks the questions "What does entertainment do?" and "What is entertainment for?".

I argue that modern entertainment attempts to simulate a more anarchic and disruptive cultural form, taking access to Bakhtin's account of the European tradition of carnival to explain this point, while also contriving always to contain and limit its celebrational and chaotic nature. I refer to a general social trend toward ever-increasing domestication and privatisation of our leisure activities, so that the very public and unifying carnival of the middle ages can in fact in no way be allied with any modern cultural form, and I argue that this can be seen as a historical shift, from a society based on carnival to one based on entertainment, that can be related to Foucault's explanation of changing power structures within modern Europe.

In seeking to be mainstream, and to be acceptable to a general, mass audience, entertainment - as disseminated by the "show business" industries - aims to appear daring while remaining unthreatening. A television programme of the 1980s is analysed in some depth to explore how this strategy works, and a particular aspect of note is that in attempting to appeal to all sections of a diverse audience, entertainment refuses to acknowledge this diversity, and aims to represent us as all the same underneath, with some tensions immanent in the text because of this.

The thesis argues that modern light entertainment, as described here, is a historically and culturally specific category. I use the work of Raymond Williams to explore the development of a language around culture in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Within an increasing differentiation of the cultural field allowing the consumption of particular cultural forms to confer and confirm cultivation on their consumers, entertainment aims to appeal universally to all of us. Thus, entertainment has an obvious classed nature, but refrains from marking its spectators off as working class (in contrast to high culture's capacity to mark its consumers as upwardly mobile or cultivated).

Entertainment is traditionally understood in contrast to "art", a contrast carrying an implicitly recognised and accepted set of polarities. If culture is serious, worthwhile, lasting, demanding, creative and original, entertainment is trivial, valueless, ephemeral, easy, and formulaic. Within this construction, entertainment is essentially characterised by absence - it lacks the qualities that distinguish true culture.



I argue that this polarity is not so much an external interpretation imposed on entertainment, as a strategy within entertainment itself. I refer to Bourdieu's account of the political functions of so-called "legitimate culture" in maintaining class distinction, and posit a parallel function within entertainment, which continually articulates this set of polarities, allowing entertainment texts to represent themselves as pleasurable in contrast to the hard work involved in engaging with high culture, and as universally appealing in contrast with the minority appeal and pretentiousness of "art". I explore a British film from the 1930s starring George Formby to demonstrate this point.

I name this strategy within entertainment texts as vulgarity, defining this as a deliberate refusal to be respectable, and to place oneself outside of the field of culture. In setting up this vulgar space, entertainment provides us with a period of relief from social aspiration, within which we do not seek to demonstrate cultural knowledge or cultivation. This representation of itself as without artistic merit is essential to the working of entertainment, and the fluidity of the category is demonstrated by the many cultural texts which have shifted historically from the field of entertainment to that of art, and *vice versa.*

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant academic developments in postwar Britain has been the steadily growing interest in all forms of popular culture. Areas of cultural practice that had previously received little or no attention have been the subject of sustained and illuminating work. This development has affected traditional fields of study, such as literature and sociology, but has also involved the establishment of new academic disciplines. In the last two decades especially, courses in popular culture, film studies and media studies (among other related subjects) have become an essential part of many British universities and colleges, and the value of the work they do has been acknowledged by an ever–widening body. An indication of this process can be found in the terms within which The John Logie Baird Centre was set up in the early eighties as an attempt to break down the barriers between theory and practice, for example through the presence of figures such as Jeremy Isaacs and Verity Lambert on the Advisory Board.

I would like to suggest that one aspect of popular culture has not received the attention it deserves. Entertainment is a central conceptual category in discourses around popular culture, both within texts and outside of them. I believe it is important to question this concept. What do we mean by 'entertainment'? What, if anything, is specific about it? It is quite clear that the term implies popularity, but the connection between the two remains vague. I would like to suggest that it is of crucial importance that we look at the relationship between class and culture in order to pursue this line of enquiry. On the other hand, I do not intend to delve into the field of popular culture in order to discover radical or progressive potential, or the absence of it. Instead, let us try to understand the internal logic of entertainment. What does entertainment mean? What does it aim to do for its

audience? What is specific about it, within the field of culture?

The theoretical tools for such an exploration should first be sought within the approaches that have dominated cultural studies for the last forty or so years, and in this introduction I intend to briefly survey some of the implications of these approaches. With this aim, then, I shall look respectively at Marxist theorisations of culture, (focusing on the work of the Frankfurt School and developments from this work), the British "Culturalists" and post-modernist and post-structuralist theory.

Marx produces a theoretical paradigm within which culture can be understood in relation to historically specific modes of production and the dialectics of class struggle[1]. The "base/superstructure" model and the somewhat problematic positioning of ideology within his theory have proved to be the main blocking concepts that generation after generation of Marxist cultural theorists have had to find their own way of dealing with (significant examples include Lukács, Gramsci, Benjamin, and Althusser).

Brecht represents an important Marxist response to popular culture. Brecht was clearly interested in the specificity of entertainment as opposed to bourgeois theatrical forms ("naturalism") – his development of the central concept of the alienation effect can be traced to his interest in the British music hall early in his career. Related to this was Brecht's abiding concern that a political theatre would need to be popular. Thus, in his celebrated "Short Organum of the Theatre", he makes his perspective clear:

> "Let us treat the theatre as a place of entertainment, as is proper in an aesthetic discussion, and try to discover which type of entertainment suits us best."[2]

However, while he was clearly very mindful of the differences between popular entertainment and more culturally prestigious theatrical forms, Brecht's main concern was to make an intervention into theatre, rather than to explain the nature of traditional popular theatrical forms. It is this that has made Brecht so influential in relation to theatrical practice. In developing this new political theatre, Brecht defines it against naturalist theatre, providing an analysis that has been extremely useful for later theorists of

culture (such as Colin MacCabe and Peter Wollen[3]). However, he does not provide any real insight into the nature and political status of popular culture.

One other aspect of Brecht which is, however, quite useful for us, is his insistence on identifying cultural forms with particular class interests: "Society cannot share a common communication system so long as it is split into warring classes"[4]. For Brecht, this goes with the assumption that bourgeois theatre works in the interests of dominant ideology. However, this does also suggest that we should look further at precisely what class interests underlie working class cultural practices.

.The Frankfurt School had an interest in the political functions of culture, and the work of Theodor Adorno is especially significant for us in this regard. In Adorno we find a cultural theorist for whom the category of entertainment is distinct and meaningful. The great advantage of his analysis is his insistence on examining culture as an industry and his readiness to consider the social function of this industry within late capitalist societies (both those of Nazi Germany and the United States). Within this approach, first outlined in Dialectic of Enlightenment[5], co-written with Max Horkheimer, entertainment texts are commodities. Thus, far from seeking cultural value in these texts, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that they only contain an exchange value, within a "culture industry".

This approach to mass culture was typical of the Frankfurt School, as for example expressed by Marcuse in One-Dimensional Man:

"If mass communications blend together harmoniously, and often unnoticeably, art, politics, religion and philosophy with commercials, they bring these realms of culture to their common denominator – the commodity form"[6]

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that this culture industry plays out the ideological role of keeping us docile within capitalism, by constructing us as consumers. They do not

suggest that this is economic basis is a new development within the cultural field - cultural texts have always been commodities - but rather that whereas Art in a bourgeois society tries to hide its nature as a commodity, mass entertainment sells itself precisely on the basis that it is a product, and that we are therefore constructed as consumers rather than art-lovers:

> "..a change in the character of the art commodity itself is coming about. What is new is not that it is a commodity, but that today it deliberately admits it is one; that art renounces its own autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumption goods constitutes the charm of a novelty."[6a]

Within late capitalist society, what we seek is amusement and distraction, and entertainment is a commodity aiming at meeting this felt need - entertainment helps us get by. For us as subjects, satisfaction and happiness is defined in relation to the "need" for entertainment:

> "The principle dictates that he should be shown all his needs as capable of fulfilment, but that those needs should be so predetermined that he feels himself to be the eternal consumer, the object of the culture industry." [7]

Thus, the pleasure afforded by entertainment is deeply suspect, and serves to ensure the co-operation of workers with the class system. Entertainment stops us from resisting exploitation, or dreaming of anything higher: "To be pleased means to say yes"[8]; "they must laugh and be content with laughter"[9].

The contrast between works of art and works of entertainment, lies in their capacity for pointing to something higher. "The secret of aesthetic sublimation is its

representation of fulfilment as a broken promise. The culture industry does not sublimate; it represses."[10] That is, genuine human creativity had a value, which was to point out the difference between what is, and what could be, whereas the culture industry, on the contrary, executes a kind of deception, holding out itself as the answer. "The promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu"[11]. Within this construction, therefore, entertainment has a very clear political function in assuring the people that their situation is satisfactory, whereas art had some capacity for pointing to a different world. Entertainment, by feeding us a very limited and prescribed dream, stops us dreaming of or hoping for anything higher.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, the difference between art and entertainment is not so much a contrast of two fields within a static model - instead they suggest that we are moving from a society within which art was possible to one in which all culture is industrialised:

> "Today aesthetic barbarity completes what has threatened the creations of the spirit since they were gathered together as culture and neutralised". [12]

Introducing the category of " 'light' art", they explain that, as the ideal product sought after within the culture industry, it represents a merging of art and entertainment, in a "standardised average of late liberal taste"[13]. Both high art and pure vulgarity are squeezed out in a move toward the middle ground.

> "The fusion of culture and entertainment that is taking place today leads not only to a depravation of culture, but inevitably to an intellectualization of amusement".[14]

They suggest that, whereas pure amusement would simply present us with pleasure and satisfaction, mass culture does not aim for a purely escapist experience taking the spectator away from their difficulties and those of the world:

> "[Mass culture] does not shrink from tragedy. Mass culture deals with it, in the same way as a centralised society does not abolish the suffering of its members but records and plans it. That is why it borrows so persistently from art. This provides the tragic substance which pure amusement cannot itself supply... It provides the regular movie-goer with the scraps of culture he must have for prestige."14.

Therefore, 'light' art aims to simulate art, but nevertheless does not include a capacity for pure expression, with its radical potential. As a mass industry aimed at the working class, there can be no room for true aesthetic vision - "serious art has been withheld from those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness" 15. On the other hand, the cultural industry does not allow a capacity for complete freedom of constraint. "Pure amusement.. is cut short by the amusement on the market... We do not have the cap and bells of the jester but the bunch of keys of capitalist reason" 16.

Thus, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, the entertainment texts of American society reflect and are limited by the nature of that society, not just in their content, but in their form - "the ostensible content is merely a faded background; what sinks in is the automatic succession of standardised operations"17. Entertainment's uniformity and standardisation is therefore an echo of the mechanised nature of our work and our lives within an industrial capitalist society. Instead of letting us escape into something different entertainment faces us with our everyday lives. "The paradise offered by the culture

industry in the same old drudgery"[18]. Thus it is not an escape from our exploitation within capitalism - instead of helping us to forget this, it promotes our resignation to it.

Adorno and Horkheimer's work is important in posing a clear political function for the culture industry, and within this reading the purpose of entertainment is clear. However, in taking this position, they are forced into granting entertainment something of a hypnotising power over its consumers - for them, the culture industry has a capacity for "control of the individual consciousness"[19], and Dialectics of Enlightenment at times seems imbued with a nostalgic longing for a capacity that has been robbed of the people by an all-powerful ideology. As pointed out by Roisier and Willig, this rather simplistic view of the power of culture might have been complemented well with Gramsci's notion of ideological hegemony[20].

As it is, this almost magical power ascribed to entertainment remains something of a weakness in Adorno and Horkheimer's argument, and has laid them open to a charge of simple European prejudice against American culture, their concept of a historical shift seems touched by a nostalgia for a lost culture. Jameson argues that Dialectic of Enlightenment can be re-read as a text belonging to particular literary tradition - "that travel literature produced by Europeans as a result of their often horrified contact with the new North American democracy, and in particular with the originality of its political, social and cultural forms"[21].

And while their insight partly arises from a de-familiarisation with American popular culture, it certainly appears as though, in their constant insistence on the uniformity of the products of the cultural industry they are missing something of the subtlety of entertainment. It may well be at least as much this blindness, as much as their

political perspective, that has given rise to criticism of Adorno's perspective. For instance, Jameson calls for a new reading of Adorno, from the standpoint that we are now located in a postmodern culture in which the polarity between art and entertainment is less clear:

> "...the virtual disappearance of what Adorno used to oppose to [commercial art] as 'high culture' - namely, modernism itself - clears the field, and leaves the impression of a now universalised culture, whose logic now describes a continuum from 'art' to 'entertainment' in place of the older value oppositions of high and low."[21a]

In this context, Jameson suggests that what we can gain from Adorno is precisely his willingness to address the issue of the power of entertainment:

> "Perhaps today, where the triumph of more utopian theories of mass culture seems complete and virtually hegemonic, we need the corrective of some new theory of manipulation, and of a properly postmodern commodification (which could not in any case be the same as Adorno and Horkheimer's now historical one)"[21b]

Sloterdijk's Critique of Cynical Reason represents another important response to Adorno's analysis of culture. In giving an account of Critical Theory, Sloterdijk praises Adorno's sensitivity - precisely his refusal to accept the given order. However, this is marred by Adorno's purely negative and authoritarian understanding of power, within which we are represented as passive subjects of society. Nevertheless, for Sloterdijk, there is an essentially positive thrust in Adorno's Critical Theory:

> "Although it scarcely believed in a change for the better, it did not give in to the temptation to desensitize itself or to get used to the given order of things. To remain sensitive was, as it were, a utopian stance"[22]

Sloterdijk draws on this utopianism and expands it. He mobilises the concept of Kynicism, developed from Diogenes, and contrasts this viewpoint and mode of presentation with the cynical reason of Adorno, and of modern thought in general. Sloterdijk explains kynicism as a historical phenomenon - the "ancient critique of civilisation"[23]. This plebeian response to oppression operated through laughter, and was a mode of resistance that operated on an everyday level, through enjoyment. It was "existence in resistance, in laughter, in refusal, in the appeal to the whole of nature and a full life"[24].

In contrast to this, cynicism developed as a historical response to kynicism. It is "the reply of the rulers and the ruling culture to the kynical provocation"[25]. While cynicism may acknowledge the truth of the oppression that is revealed by kynicism, it essentially serves to maintain that oppression. Thus, while kynicism is fundamentally resistant and hopeful, and coming from the people, cynicism is essentially repressive and pessimistic, and coming from authority.

Sloterdijk characterises our current Western civilisation as in a state of self-destructive cynicism, that he sees as most evident in the arms policies of the developed nations and in particular those countries with atomic weapons - "these civilizations are going through a crisis of their innermost vitality that is probably without historical parallel"[26]. Thus Sloterdijk mourns the loss of kynicism and calls for its return:

> "Does cheekiness, which recalls the rights to happiness, still have a chance? Is the kynical impulse really dead, and is it only cynicism that has a grand, deadly future?"[27]

Sloterdijk presents these historically located positions as in conflict with each other in our society, in our culture, and in our consciousness. He calls for an integrating philosophy, integrating because "it does not let itself be seduced by the attraction of the 'great problems', but instead initially finds its themes in the trivial, in everyday life, in the so-called unimportant, in those things that otherwise are not worth speaking about"[28]. According to Sloterdijk, it is only by looking at these trivialities that we can notice the kynical when it arises - with this change of perspective we can "recognise the kynical impulse for which the 'low-brow themes' are not too low"[29]. These goes along with a more complex understanding of power than that of Adorno's - power is not purely with those in authority, it comes from above and below. Without a readiness to look at the trivial, we will fail to recognise the ways in which resistance does take place - "half of normality consists of microscopic deviations from the norms"[30].

In accordance with this approach, Sloterdijk looks at the language of the body, an "undercurrent in our cultural life"[31] which operates beneath the surface of verbal language. By drawing out this physiognomic sense Sloterdijk aims to recognise a language that creates a sense of closeness between people - he contrasts his physiognomy to science, whose striving for objective truth has involved losing a connectedness to the human race. Scientists "lose the capacity to behave as neighbours of the world; they think in concepts of distance, not of friendship; they seek overviews, not neighbourly involvement"[32]. In contrast to this, a true philosophy would seek wisdom without sacrificing closeness and intimacy, and Sloterdijk argues that within genuine philosophy "flows a warm current of a convivial intellectuality and a libidinous closeness to the world that compensates for the objectifying drive toward the domination of things"[33]

Sloterdijk, then, in seeking to draw out the physiognomic sense, aims to highlight a shared knowledge, a common language that we all understand and can take access to, a language within which kynicism and cynicism are in everyday conflict. Thus he looks at the language of facial expressions (such as "Tongue, Stuck Out", and "Mouth, Smiling Maliciously, Crooked"); the meanings available to and inherent in, different parts of the body ("Breasts", "Arses"); and the meaning of bodily functions ("Farts").

Within this physiognomy, Sloterdijk's analysis of a certain kind of laughter is of some interest to us, in a passage entitled "Mouth, Laughing Loudly, Big-Mouthed"[34]. Here, he describes the difference between a smile that is rooted in cynicism - and therefore characterised by an underlying melancholy and contempt, and which communicates isolation and restraint - and a full-blooded kynical laughter which "comes from the intestines...is grounded at the animal level and lets itself go without restraint"[35]. Such laughter is unselfconscious, and is self-celebratory.

Clearly, such laughter is from the outset in conflict with a cynical world-view. "It is characteristic for the kynic to laugh so loudly and unabashedly that refined people shake their heads... Those who are too civilized and timid easily get the impression that there could be something demonic, devilish, unserious, and destructive in such laughter"[36]. Such laughter does not accept or recognise authority or subservience - it claims for the laugher a right to be happy.

Thus, within our expressions of pleasure, according to Sloterdijk, we are embroiled in a conflict between the cynical and the kynical - between a dominant mode founded on pessimism, seriousness, and isolation, and scarcely recognised moments of resistance to this mode based on rebelliousness, joy, hopefulness and commonality.

Sloterdijk also suggests that it is through these two positions that "the opposition of high culture and people's culture is lived out"[38], although this conflict in the cultural arena remains largely unexplored in his book. Sloterdijk sees bourgeois art as an arena within which kynicism has been an underlying force - within which in fiction "human beings announce… their claim to a full life"[39], and sees early bourgeois art as having a revolutionary element:

> "Its kynical impulse… wants to jump out of fiction into reality. Aesthetic amoralism is only a prelude to life demanding its sensual rights practically."[40]

However, Sloterdijk sees this aspect of the kynical impulse in the arts as always under threat by social forces, to keep the call for joy restricted to the text itself. Sloterdijk argues that with aesthetic modernism, the arts have lost their capacity for pleasure, enjoyment, real laughter, and have sunk into a world of cynicism - "only in snobbery… does the pleasure in unenjoyability flourish"[41]. However, he sees mass entertainment as a site for this limited, fictionalised form of kynicism:

> "Art cries for life as soon as the kynical impulse is at play within it. Wherever aesthetic techniques are involved, in the press as well as the electronic media, in advertising as well as commodity aesthetics, this call is brought to the masses in its fictionally restricted form."[42]

This restrained form contrasts strongly with Sloterdijk's view of carnival as a temporary inversion of the power relations and the ordered world(derived from Bakhtin), which he claims as a central locus within which a full-blooded kynical cheekiness was given an unrestrained space, within which the people "brought their dreams to life"[43]. The movement from this historical carnival to entertainment is one of increasing limitation and

trivialisation: "For a long time now carnival has meant not 'inverted world' but flight into a safe world, of anaesthesia from a permanently inverted world full a daily absurdities"[44]. This shift echoes a more general shift within our society toward a degradation and trivialisation of the kynical - Sloterdijk explains that the negative connotations of the word "cheeky", or "frech" in German, are recent, and that this echoes the gradual loss of kynicism in our culture:

> "In Old High German, it meant a productive aggressivity, letting fly at the enemy: 'brave, bold, lively, plucky, untamed, ardent'. The devitalization of a culture is mirrored in the history of this word."[45]

Adorno and Sloterdijk, therefore, provide an interesting contrast in terms of their response to proletarian humour and laughter. While Adorno has a view of entertainment as an industry mobilising a constrained form of laughter to distract us and prevent us from conceiving of anything higher than our role in a capitalist society, Sloterdijk explores laughter as a liberating activity (the area Adorno and Horkheimer categorise as pure amusement), giving us the capacity to feel hope and joy, within a society that is losing this capacity.

Writers such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and to some extent E. P. Thompson[46], whose work is sometimes grouped together under the heading of British Culturalism, produced a body of work in the late fifties and early sixties that has been extremely influential within the field of cultural studies in Britain. The major strength of this work is a sophistication of the notion of culture, which politicises cultural practice, and relates it to the issue of class. The degree of awareness with which this is done varies among these writers, from Hoggart whose lack of any explicit political motivation can

now more easily be seen as masking a fundamentally reactionary stance, to Williams and Thompson whose work is founded on a deliberate political strategy. In looking at popular culture, then, these writers have a major advantage over previous writers, in that they have an understanding that culture should be looked at in terms of the society within which it occurs. However, for both Williams and Hoggart, there is a bias toward the literary that tends to distort the specificity of popular cultural forms that are examined. To some extent such a bias might be seen as inevitable given the academic climate within which these writers worked (and in the case of Williams I would not wish to claim that this bias devalued the importance of his conclusions).

This work, especially that of Williams and Hoggart, is of major importance to the present thesis. Williams' work is especially useful in that his examination of language around the field of culture draws out some important points about a set of historical changes that took place in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that led to a meaningful distinction between art and entertainment. Williams' books Culture and Society, The Long Revolution, and Keywords look closely at the functions that art came to take on in post–industrial Britain. However, I would argue that Williams' concern with cultural value, however, limits the cultural field he considers worthy of attention, and it is noticeable that while he closely examines the changes that took place within language around high culture, he fails to examine in such detail the language around popular culture. In my first chapter I aim to redress this omission.

Hoggart cannot be said to be so shy of popular culture, and his major work The Uses of Literacy is an attempt to map out the cultural strength and diversity of the Northern working class. This work is of importance to us, despite the naïveté of his approach. Specifically, what he refers to as "debunking" is an aspect of popular culture that is very useful in attempting to define the aims of entertainment. Again, however, it is the central concern with cultural value that invalidates much of his work, which is more concerned with playing one area of cultural practice off against another on the basis of its

integrity than in looking at each area of cultural practice as worthy of study in itself. This tendency is most noticeable in his central structuring conception of the modern (seen as mass, crass, empty) as opposed to the traditional (seen as authentic, strong, rich). Thus, Hoggart idealises one cultural tradition and demonises another.

Pierre Bourdieu, the French Marxist sociologist takes a more analytic approach to culture[47]. For many years his work has been regarded as rather eccentric, and it is only recently that its relevance to the British academic world has begun to be recognised. Bourdieu provides an extremely detailed analysis of what he calls "legitimate culture" (Art), based on empirical data, in which he gives an explanation of how it is that it works in the interests of the middle class (an assumption that we have seen in Brecht and Williams). This explanation is less to do with ideology, than with a kind of capacity that legitimate culture has to "distinguish" the middle class. Because Bourdieu's notion of culture relates to all human behaviour – eating habits, dress sense, deportment – with cultural practice as such seen as a rather privileged manifestation of the same process, this capacity is understood to have overwhelming implications with regard to maintaining a bourgeois power structure, and the naturalisation of middle class hegemony.

While this understanding of culture is extremely illuminating, it leaves some questions unanswered. Specifically, he can be seen as falling into the same rather simplistic Marxist approach to popular culture that we have already noted. Seeing texts within the field of legitimate culture as characterised by the presence of complex codes that exclude the uneducated, Bourdieu sees popular culture as simply characterised by their absence. This places him in a somewhat ludicrous position – the festivity that he notes in popular culture, for example, must be seen as completely natural, and uncoded. It is central to the work of this thesis that we provide some explanation of the conventions of this field, which I will refer to as the vulgar. Bourdieu's notable omission flies in the face of the more familiar French theory in the field of cultural studies. His refusal to acknowledge any act of reading taking place by the consumer of popular culture seems

particularly striking given his debt to the more familiar semiotic and structuralist French theory, and its insistence on the coded nature of all texts.

Structuralism and poststructuralism have been of crucial importance within the study of popular culture – and specifically film studies – precisely because they have opened up a way of looking at texts in relation to the codes and structures of signification that are used in the reading of these texts. This approach has been of such importance that it has increasingly come to supercede more traditional approaches to textual study in general – leading to books such as Re-reading English[48], and causing a degree of unease within the British academic world that is well exemplified by the disagreement and controversy surrounding Colin MacCabe's structural approach to literature in Cambridge University.

Roland Barthes has been one of the dominant figures of structuralist and poststructuralist analysis. His close readings of texts – for example his analysis of a Balzac short story in S/Z[49], which aims at opening out the text revealing a deeply complex series of significations – have been the model for similar approaches to film and other texts. However, Barthes' own analyses have been generally restricted to the field of high culture, despite his early look at more popular forms in Mythologies[50]. In line with his own background in literary studies, Barthes seems to be trapped within the field of "legitimate culture", betraying an assumption that only culturally prestigious texts are worthy of such detailed analysis. This assumption would seem to underlie Mythologies as well, in that it tends to adopt a rather patronising approach to the practices it describes. While he provides an illuminating examination of popular iconography, it is taken that this iconography is almost anonymous and 'authorless'. At times the book seems to take the attitude of trying out a literary approach on popular culture, rather than looking at popular culture for its own sake.

This straightforward adoption of high culture as the proper object of study characterises much post-structuralist criticism. It could be argued that, as the scope of

theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva's approaches to critical analysis [51] is constrained by the limits of the literary canon, this canonical status remains unquestioned and is in fact validated and reinforced by their reluctance to grant any attention to texts which are not habitually granted aesthetic worth. Because of this limitation, these theorists are unable to engage critically with the concept of cultural value, which is taken for granted.

The much earlier work of Mikhail Bakhtin[52] – written within the context of Russian Formalism, but which has been deeply influential for structuralist linguistics through the work of Todorov and Kristeva[53], among others – might be seen as redressing this balance. While he is also primarily concerned with works of literature, his work must be considered of great relevance to the present project, in that, as part of his work on Rabelais, he provides an ambitious explanation of the historically specific nature of carnival. Refusing to see carnivalesque activity as a direct, 'natural' expression of libidinal impulses, he explores carnival as a complex system of meanings, and shows the contradictory position that carnival occupied within the political structure of the middle ages. This work suggests an investigation of the possible presence of carnivalesque characteristics in modern entertainment forms, as well as an alertness to possible differences between entertainment and carnival.

Of the contemporary poststructuralist theorists who engage with ideas of contemporary or postmodern cultural practice, Jean–Francois Lyotard has possibly been the most influential[54]. However, he indirectly re–introduces the distinction between mass art and minority culture when he distinguishes between "experimental postmodernism" and an "eclectic" postmodernism of "anything goes" that fulfils the needs of the capitalist market. "Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture... It is easy to find a public for eclectic works... in the absence of aesthetic criteria, it remains possible and useful to assess the value of works of art according to profits they yield"[55]. With this polarity between "general culture" and culture proper, we appear to be placed back in the

limitations of the Frankfurt school.

Michel Foucault's work is of far more relevance to this thesis, and although his work is not directly concerned with cultural practices, his methodology has informed the approach I have taken in the present work, and I think it is worth dwelling on it a little. In The Archaeology of Knowledge[56] Foucault defined the project of his work to that date and distinguished it from conventional history – the "history of ideas". Foucault's "archaeological" approach, by examining disruption as opposed to continuity, by looking at the past in its difference from the present, disallowed the teleological tendencies of other histories. Instead of narrating the flow from one period to the next in a way that made such change appear inevitable, Foucault wanted to examine both the stabilities in power relations different from our own and the cause and effects of their replacement, especially in terms of the conceptualisations that allow specific changes to take place, and that result from such changes. Clearly such an approach would highlight the motives of historical change, and have as its aim the issue of what is at stake within individual historical developments. This model would suggest that entertainment might be seen as a historically specific discursive formation, and it is a central aim of the present work to explore something of the internal logic of this construction.

An attack on the subject is essential within this context, because, according to Foucault, "making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought"[57]. Following from this, Mark Poster elucidates the false assumption that necessarily debilitates those histories which revolve around subjectivity:

> "Domination today takes the form of a combination or structure of knowledge and power which is not external to the subject, but still unintelligible from his or her perspective. Critical theory cannot present history as the transition from abusive aristocrats to exploiting capitalists, because domination is no longer centred in or

caused by subjects."[58]

To counter the defects of such an approach, an archaeology of human knowledge would be based on the analysis of the discursive formations operating around specific objects and areas, and the description of the postivities that are given rise to by these formations. This understanding of discourse sees it as non–expressive, and therefore non–subjective.

There are political advantages in this "archaeological" methodology, which reveals a unity between (conventional) left–wing histories and bourgeois history, inasmuch as neither can conceive of processes that are not under the control of the ruling classes, leaving Marxism with a conception of power as fundamentally repressive, and being brought to bear on the proletariat by the bourgeosie. Such a conception of the working of power relations can scarcely account for the docility of the working class. The History of Sexuality[59] is an example of how Foucault's conception of discursive formations overturns such assumptions, and demonstrates their falsity. According to this book, the conception of the Victorian age as sexually repressive is false, as the effect of the restrictions around sexual behaviour that built up at this time was in fact precisely to produce a discursive formation around sex, and thus to establish and naturalise forms of knowledge within which sexuality is the central determination and motivation of human behaviour. Furthermore, such a conception was not immediately destined for the working class, who initially resisted "the deployment of sexuality", but was articulated in the respectability and restraint demanded of the middle classes themselves. Clearly, culture was one of the central arenas within which this restraint and respectability – or the absence of it – was demonstrated. This would beg the question: what are the implications of the development of a discourse around culture that appears to have as its aim the formation of two opposing categories – that of the artistic and the vulgar?

This thesis posits an archaeological disruption within Western culture - a historical shift from a carnivalesque society to a society of entertainment. We can detect a correlation between this disruption and Foucault's conception of the shift from the Classical age (leading from the Renaissance to the beginning of the nineteenth century), to the present Modern age, and in particular to relate it to Foucault's analysis, in Discipline and Punish, of a move from a form of punishment that is public and spectacular to a form that is secretive, and from a form which aims to highlight power relations are highlighted to a form which aims to hide them. We will look at this in more detail in Chapter Three. The shift from carnival to entertainment is a shift from a form of pleasure that is public, to one that is increasingly private, from celebration that is chaotic and unpredictable, to celebration that is contained and controlled, from an activity that is very involving and participative, demanding intense engagement, to one that is more distant, and demanding more casual involvement - the carnival-goer becomes the spectator, the consumer. Entertainment is therefore a commodified version of carnival, an industry that has the capacity to sell us a sense of community, freedom, celebration. As a business, entertainment seeks to sell us this form of happiness on an everyday basis, and increasingly so with the move from public forms such as cinema to more private forms such as television. This contrasts starkly with the exceptional and seasonal nature of historical forms of carnival.

In this context, what form does entertainment take? I am arguing that entertainment is a tempered down version of carnival, a version of carnival fitting the modern age. But given that all cultural forms could be seen to fall into this transformation, of a gradual subduing and containment of anarchic celebration, what is it

that now distinguishes entertainment from art - from cultural forms whose production and distribution is similarly business-like, but which are consumed with an understanding that they are culturally prestigious?

This thesis argues that entertainment is distinguished by the inclusion of a component I am referring to as vulgarity. Vulgarity is an element in modern entertainment that aims to make it look rebellious or anarchistic, even though it is in fact highly contained - an element designed to give entertainment something of the air of carnival. Vulgarity is precisely the capacity of entertainment to give its consumers a sense of belonging, of freedom, of relaxation.

What do I mean by vulgarity here? I am not referring to a fixed set of characteristics - neither a fixed set of textual strategies (such as the breaking down of the barrier between performer and spectator), nor a certain body of content (such as the inclusion of scatological, sexual or rude material) - although these characteristics are common markers of vulgarity. Instead, vulgarity is deeply dependant on social context. I am defining as vulgar wherever a cultural text is not striving for artistic recognition, wherever it is not claiming cultural merit for itself. The extent to which a text is not aiming to display creative originality, and publicly declares its aim to be the satisfaction of the audience's desire above that of the expression of the artist's individuality, is the extent to which that text is vulgar, in this sense.

Thus, we cannot define material as vulgar purely on the basis of its content, but rather in relation to its context. The inclusion of apparently "vulgar" material in works of art is in no sense a contradiction, but simply mark of the fluidity of these categories. This is not vulgarity in the sense I am using it here - instead, elements that have traditionally

been associated with low culture are here daringly used for high culture. Such borrowings do not challenge the distinction between the two areas.

A great entertainer may be seen as original in that they are more spectacular or daring, and are evoking a greater sense of thrill or shock in the audience, whereas a great artist is seen as having an original creative vision aside from the concerns of his or her audience. Once an entertainer is portrayed or perceived in this way, they are no longer vulgar.

However, a challenge facing entertainment texts is how to include vulgar content while still remaining mainstream. Unlike the carnivalesque, entertainment is a part of our everyday lives. We do not step out of our normal role or social position, and there is no seasonal licence to behave in a way we would not normally behave. Entertainment, then, must find a way of including such elements, but mollifying them, making light of them sufficiently in order for the text to be seen as harmless. The laughter of many entertainment texts relies on their attempt to shock but still remain acceptable.

Thus, mass entertainment often falls into a space in the middle space between forms of "sub-culture" with a minority appeal which may really aim to shock. Light entertainment, on the other hand, may want to pretend it is shocking, or aim to create an illusion of an environment characterised by freedom, by a sense that anything goes.
In this thesis, we will look at the ways in which different texts negotiate this complex space within which they include vulgarity but ensure that it is acceptable.

In relation to this, it is important to recognise the different relationships that carnival and entertainment have with social class. That is, while carnival aimed to embrace the whole of society in an inclusive and disruptive break from the norm, entertainment is

identified as the low class field of culture, in contrast with high culture which is clearly associated with a middle class, educated, "cultured" audience. This is not to say that entertainment itself is addressed exclusively to a working class audience. On the contrary, entertainment aims to be universally appealing.

As an industry in need of consumers, mass entertainment aims to broaden its appeal as far as possible, and constantly seeks a wider audience. It may be that the capacity to achieve this with humour that is identifiably working class has been under threat in post-war Britain, given the complex shifts within class identities and the nature of the working class. Arthur Marwick, using a very broad brush, gives a nevertheless useful overview of these developments:

> "The critical development in the ever-shifting context of class is that of 'de-industrialisation' leading, on the one hand, to an incontestable shrinkage in the bed-rock core of the working class, those employed in manual work within manufacturing industry, and on the other, to an expansion of opportunity in a new world of consultancies and agencies, or in short, of high-class serving and selling, the world of the 'yuppies', the young and upwardly mobile. The implications are clear: a vanishing working class, a rapidly expanding middle-class..."[60]

Marwick questions this apparent implication - that the shift from manufacturing to services is in fact is leading to a reduced working class, and instead agrees with other commentators, such as Edgell and Callinicos, that the nature of the working class within late capitalism has changed, and should be seen as including those within service industries. However, there has been a clear development in Britain within which we are

pulled in the direction of competition and upward mobility, with a concomitant weakening of the concept of community.

To understand the classed nature of entertainment, then, we need a fluid and dynamic model of class identity. At the point where we engage with entertainment, we resign from social aspiration, and temporarily allow ourselves to belong to the mass of society. A strategy underlying light entertainment is to articulate the concept that fundamentally we are all the same. To the extent we engage with culturally prestigious texts we define ourselves as cultured, as respectable, as middle class, and to the extent which engage with entertainment we show disregard for cultural aspiration. Thus, we constantly define and redefine our class status through our choice of cultural activity, and entertainment allows us a moment of relief, within which we can be happy as we are.

WHAT IS "ENTERTAINMENT"?

Entertainment is a complex term. Aside from its usage in a non–cultural context, to refer to the giving of hospitality (which I will nevertheless be connecting to the implications the term has in its reference to a specific area of cultural practice), its usage within discussions and debates around culture is itself ambiguous. Referring to the gratification associated with cultural consumption, it is now perfectly commonplace for what is considered to be great art to also be described as entertaining, even as entertainment.

An example of such usage would be Picasso's famous description of himself – "I am simply a public entertainer who understood his time"[1]. But such usage can scarcely avoid being framed ironically: we know, and the subject/object of the utterance knows, that he is normally seen as a great artist. The force of the statement derives from our knowledge of an unstated but clear polarity, of a difference which, it is important for us to realise, is not taken issue with by this claim – all that is at stake here, as it were, is the status of Picasso, on which side of the division he should be placed (in fact, through this statement he contrives to stake a claim to both arenas).

Thus, the term entertainment, as well as referring to the engagement that cultural phenomena achieve from their audience, also tends to branch off a specific group of cultural events and practices, those that are seen as more immediately and easily supplying that gratification: these, in fact, are entertainment, and not art. Entertainment is understood as a specific category - it defines and classifies a discrete and precise set of cultural activities and texts. The frequency of its usage, and the ease with which the cultural field is divided into 'high' and 'low' cultures, both by those defending and those attacking the supposed nature of entertainment, is evidence of the confidence with which this categorisation is accepted.

Nevertheless, the specificity of this area tends to be undefined and loose – it remains unquestioned, in fact, what are those features which cause a given text, most typically a performance, film or TV programme, to be seen as entertainment. On the whole, this is explained negatively: art is valuable, unique, permanent, educational,

difficult, challenging, innovative, the product of a creative mind; entertainment is none of these – it is trivial, conventional, mass–produced, easy. When it is criticised, the common response "it's just entertainment" is precisely a defence that acknowledges this absence that lies at the heart of our conception of popular culture. It is as though relaxation and pleasure are seen as naturally tied to entertainment – anything else, such as creative input, or uplifting, educational or artistic material may be possible, but still remains an imposition, not related to the entertainment itself. To return to the Picasso quote, it is clear that its (mild) shock–value derives from the explaining of his success in terms other than those of the creative artist. It is somewhat startling for Picasso to describe himself in terms of his appeal, rather than his artistic intentions.

Entertainment is therefore a value–loaded term. Discussion of this field – which we can hesitantly associate with the area categorised academically as popular culture (though this term carries a different set of implications) – runs the risk of adopting this polarity between art and entertainment without question, unless it deliberately aims at problematising it. It is important to question the common acceptance of entertainment's difference, and the everyday assumptions as to its nature. With this in mind, I intend to explore the development of this opposition between two cultural fields, art and entertainment, which in the English language has a clear historical specificity.

Raymond Williams' Keywords[2] takes the form of a vocabulary of commonly used terms within political, cultural, and intellectual debate. The political project within which this work is located might be seen as an attempt to unpack the values that these words can carry with them, whose aims their conventional usage is associated with. Thus, as we shall see, Williams locates the modern conception of Art, and conventional usage of the word, in alliance with bourgeois interests – and demonstrates this alliance through linguistic and etymological analysis.

Before discussing this further, I want to say a little more about the theory behind this particular methodology. In his introduction Williams refers to everyday situations within which conversation gives rise to confusions and ambiguities, leading

to a feeling that the speakers "just don't speak the same language". Williams calls these moments "critical encounters" within which is at work "a process quite central in the development of a language when, in certain words, tones and rhythms, meanings are offered, felt for, tested, confirmed, asserted, qualified, changed."[3]. Conflict is inscribed in language, then, and this conflict determines etymological change. What is at stake in Williams' analysis is more than simply a reconstruction of linguistic developments, since the relationship between language and society is not transparent. As Williams states, it is not that "language simply reflects the processes of society and history. On the contrary, it is a central aim of this book to show that some important social and historical processes occur *within* language.."[4]. Meaning is produced only through linguistic constraints – it is not that the deficiencies of language make the expression of statements subject to distortion. Rather, words are seen as carrying implicit clusters of meaning, and unspoken connections within them.

In Politics and Letters[5], a series of interviews with the editors of New Left Review, Williams explains how this approach is not simply a refutation of the humanist assumption that language simply reflects thought without any mediation taking place, it also avoids the structuralist model of language as a system that is, implicitly, universal, monolithic, and unchanging. According to Williams, language:

> "like any other social production...is the arena of all sorts of shifts and interests and relations of dominance. Certain crises around certain experiences will occur, which are registered in language in often surprising ways. The result is a notion of language as not merely the creation of arbitrary signs which are then reproduced within groups, which is the structuralist model, but of signs which take on the changeable and often reversed social relations of a given society, so that what enters into them is the contradictory and conflict–ridden social history of the people who speak the language, including all the variations between signs at any given time."[6]

Keywords began as an appendix to Williams' Culture and Society[7], and the project is very closely tied to his account of cultural developments and transformations

in this book and in The Long Revolution[8]. The latter contains a chapter on "The Social History of Dramatic Forms" where Williams explores the complex nature of the relationship between class and theatre. His conclusions are of relevance to the present work. Briefly, Williams sees the morality play of the medieval period as an authentically popular, effectively classless performance. In Tudor society, however, this tradition transformed into the interlude, which was specifically identified with the dominant aristocracy. This shift is indicated by the fact of the interlude being performed in "the halls of great houses"[9] as opposed to the public performances characteristic of Medieval society. This newly acquired classed nature determines the conflict around theatre in Elizabethan society, by which time the middle classes were beginning to politically oppose the dominance of the aristocracy. For Williams, their developing strength was partly expressed through opposition to theatre, thus creating a complex situation in which a strange sort of alliance between the masses and the aristocracy develops in defense of theatre – "The drama was kept going, throughout the period of its Elizabethan greatness, by popular support certainly, but by a kind of popular support that would have been crushed if the court and the nobility had not extended its active patronage."[10]

According to Williams "opposition to the theatre, by the commercial middle class, can be traced back to the sixteenth century"[11]. This opposition, which centred around an attack on its immorality and its frivolousness, seems surprising given the present close identification of theatre with the middle class. Williams provides a history of this tranformation:

> "From the 1680s, merchants and their wives had begun to attend the theatres, and in the eighteenth century this element in the audience grew steadily. Yet there was no sudden changeover from a dissolute court audience to a respectable middle class audience; indeed it was not until Victorian times that the audiences of ordinary theatres became 'respectable' in this way."[12]

Referring to the Victorian period, and the growth of the music hall, from the 1840s, Williams shows the complexity of this latter process. "With the ending of the

monopoly of the Patent Theatres [since the Restoration these were the only theatres legally entitled to perform plays], the minor theatres of London moved increasingly into 'legitimate' drama (they had previously been kept to 'illegitimate' forms because of the monopoly, although this was never absolute and the lines were not easily drawn). The music–halls, at first attached to taverns and then taking over or building new premises, sprang up as the old 'illegitimate' theatres went 'legitimate', and much that they did was a continuation of their traditions."[13] Thus, the prohibitive attitude that the middle classes originally formulated against theatre in general, became transferred to working class performances. It is as if the natural vulgarity that this attitude produced and discovered in popular leisure activities reinforced and highlighted the disciplined and cultivated respectability of what was becoming 'high' culture. From this perspective, we might argue that the representation of one set of practices as "vulgar" was necessary, in order to define another set of practices as "respectable".

This division of cultural activities into two separate and opposing camps – the respectable as against the vulgar, the serious as against the trivial – is seen by Williams as profoundly bourgeois, being historically tied to the growing political and economic strength of the middle class. Reaching a peak in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, it nevertheless has a history dating from the initial middle class opposition to the frivolousness of the 'leisured' class, the aristocracy. In his discussion of cultural terms in Keywords, Williams locates a systematic series of transformations of meaning that occur in accordance with this complex history. I want to recapitulate his account of some of the terms that relate to high culture, before going on to explore the usage of some of the terms that refer to the other side of the polarity.

The word **Art** referred simply to skills of a general kind until the late seventeenth century, when "there was an increasingly common specialized application to a group of skills not hitherto formally represented: painting, drawing, engraving and sculpture". However, he continues "the now dominant use of *art* and *artist* to refer to these skills was not fully established until the late C19". He also dates the distinction between *artist* and *artisan* to the late C18th. "The now normal association with

creative and *imaginative*, as a matter of classification, dates effectively from lC18 and eC19"[14].

In discussing the word **Creative** itself, Williams explains this association further. As a description of artistic activity *creative*, which had previously carried biblical associations, involved an analogy with divine creation which "by eC19th .. was conscious and powerful; by mid C19 conventional"[15], a development that expresses some of the meaning becoming placed in the notion of the creative artist. We can see that the word *art* develops in such a way as to produce a set of distinctions; according to Williams distinctions between different types of skill. It is in an extension of this process that the word **Artiste** appears in the midC19th, specialising as he says performers from visual artists, writers, and composers, but also reinforcing a difference in the value perceived in these two sets of activities. Williams historically locates this differentiation of skills – "It can be primarily related to the changes inherent in capitalist commodity production, with its specialization and reduction of use values to exchange values"[16].

According to Williams, the word **Aesthetic** became established around the mid–nineteenth century, after resistance to the word in the first half of the century. He explains: "with its specialized references to *Art*, to visual appearance, and to a category of what is 'fine' or 'beautiful', [the term *aesthetic*] is a key formation in a group of meanings which at once emphasized and isolated subjective sense–activity as the basis of art and beauty as distinct, for example, from social or cultural interpretations"[17].

The word **Culture** itself, while not a new word in the nineteenth century, as *aesthetic* was, did not refer specifically to artistic practices until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (91). In Culture and Society Williams looks at the debates within which this important new semantic construction was developed. He shows how Coleridge used the term **cultivation** for the first time in relation to the improvement of the mind, which was seen as something of a moral duty: "civilization is itself but a mixed good... where this civilization is not grounded in cultivation, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity"[18] (1837).

Matthew Arnold comes within the same tradition of thought, and his usage of culture is very close in meaning: "culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits"[19] (1869). The concept has been developed to include within it the sense of creativity, and tied up with this is the constitution of a very clear polarity – made explicit in his title Culture and Anarchy.

After these brief summaries, it should be clear that, in William's reading, artistic practices became a subject for detailed attention and precise differentiation, in language, in association with the bourgeois struggle for political, and consequently cultural, dominance. In fact, according to Williams, it is not just language reproducing this struggle, it is a struggle actually taking place in language. Thus, these analyses indicate a gradual process, leading up to and reaching some stability in the nineteenth century, whereby the words used to refer to artistic practices are invested with political meaning, having class distinction as their aim.

Williams, then, explores the usage of a range of terms in order to explain the intense investment of meaning into discourse around high culture. Unfortunately, having paid close attention to the shifts in meaning taking place in words relating to respectable, middle class cultural practice, he does not go on to explore whether a parallel struggle takes place within the language relating to popular culture. With this in mind, let us begin by looking at the usage of two words which begin to suggest the nineteenth century interest in defining and delimiting popular culture.

In order to save a place for pleasure within a capitalist work ethic, the term **"rational recreation"**[20] became conventional within a debates that had the improvement and the taming of popular culture as their aim. Usage of the word "recreation" was very deliberate: "Recreation is the RE–creation, the creation anew of fresh strength for tomorrow's work"[21] (1858). Given this meaning attributed to the word it was understood that "of WORKERS only that there can be RECREATION"[22] (1870). Much the same implication can be seen coming from a diametrically opposed

political standpoint, in Engels usage of the term in The Conditions of the Working Class in England: "he has urgent need of recreation. He must have something to make work worth his trouble, to make the prospect of the next day endurable"[23] (1844). As Peter Bailey points out, the word recreation – in this context – involves a conception of leisure as a natural complement to work.

A similar conception underlies the word **leisure** itself. As Chris Rojek points out: "the word **leisure** derives from the Latin word *licere*, meaning to be lawful or to be allowed"[24]. Thus, it is not the freedom of leisure that is emphasised, but the idea that it is subject to the permission of those in power.

In Latin Words of Common English E.L. Johnson explains the etymology of the word **Entertainment** – "from *inter* and *tenere the French made entretenir* and furnished us entertain, ie 'hold mutually'; then used for 'maintain', 'provide for' finally 'provide with comfort, hospitality, pleasure'[25]. Rick Altman explains the implications of this further:

> "borrowed from a French term meaning to keep up, to maintain, to foster or to feed, the term **entertainment** stresses the hold which certain forms of spectacle have on the spectator. By its very etymology, then, the term **entertainment** suggests a discursive phenomenon rather than an impersonal narrative form. 'Let me entertain you' = 'Let me hold your interest; let me create a bond between you and me.' The French long ago abandoned the term *entretenir* to designate various forms of popular spectacle, however. At least since Pascal the word has been *divertir* – to turn away, to distract, to divert. Far from placing emphasis on entertainment's power to hold the spectator's interest, the French term stresses instead entertainment's tendency to create 'an attack or feint that draws the

attention and force of an enemy from the point of the principal operation', as Webster's would have it (**diversion**)."[26]

In fact, during the nineteenth century in Britain, those performances which would now be known as entertainment (such as music hall, or circus type acts) were referred to by a wide variety of different terms – **amusements, diversions, spectacles**. The first of these two terms seems closer to Altman's explanation of the French use of *divertir*, but as we shall be discussing in more depth, it is a part of the implicit meaning of the art–entertainment polarity that where art demands full attention from the spectator, entertainment is only intended to give easy pleasure to the spectator without demanding any sustained interest. In respect of this, entertainment is by definition trivial.

While these explanations of Johnson and Altman indicate the way in which the word entertainment began to carry the meanings it does, they don't really consider the question of the historical specificity of the notion of entertainment itself, which Williams' cultural analysis would demand that we do. Richard Dyer's PhD thesis on Social Values of Entertainment and Show Business contains this statement which refreshingly and somewhat brashly locates this specificity:

> "There is widespread agreement that art and entertainment are different – art is what is edifying, elitist, refined, difficult, about the truth; entertainment is hedonistic, democratic, vulgar, easy, about escape and illusion and fun. This kind of specialisation would not be recognised by a pre–capitalist audience, for whom there was just performances."[27]

This is certainly a somewhat ambitious claim, and a more honest statement would acknowledge that we are perhaps not in a position of sufficient knowledge to approach the question of possible distinctions within the range of performances available to the 'pre–capitalist audience', a concept which remains unproblematised and unexplored. However, what is clear is the developing significance of this opposition between high and low form of performance during the urbanisation of the proletariat in

association with the industrial revolution.

Sporadic usage of **Entertainment** to refer to performance seems to exist from around the turn of the century: the Oxford English Dictionary, giving the definition "that which furnishes amusement..gives a public *entertainment*", quotes this title from 1793 – "Wonderful Magazine and Marvellous Chronicle, or New Weekly Entertainer"[28]. The first dictionary entry which assumes a distinction in terms of cultural or social value is Johnson's, which refers to "Dramatick performance; the lower comedy" (1755)[29]. The OED, in fact, gives thirteen definitions (mostly obsolete) which don't refer to performance at all. Of these, the following seem the most relevant:

"*7 Occupation; spending (of time). Now rare.*

8 The action of occupying (a person's) attention agreeably; interesting employment; amusement.

10 Reception (of persons); manner of reception.

11 The action of receiving a guest. Also the action of treating as a guest, of providing for the wants of a guest."[30]

These four separate definitions are, clearly, very closely related. Craig's dictionary, from 1847, adds another dimension by indicating how entertaining could be a business: "Entertainment. The receiving and accommodating of guests, either with or without reward...".[31] The emphasis on the giving of hospitality might be seen as forming the kind of conceptual basis that allowed entertainment finally to refer to the developing tradition of performances that had throughout the nineteenth century, as I have noted, no single stable name. Taking place within music halls, the performances themselves had no privileged or guaranteed attention from the audiences, in fact their function was largely simply to reinforce the sense of festivity, hospitality and warmth that taverns and inns had as drinking places, places of leisure and relaxation.

This image is demonstrated by the following statement from 1677:

"This world is little other than our Inn to entertain us in our Journey to another life"[32] ("to show hospitality to").

In contrast to the separation between spectators and performance that had been developing with the legitimate drama, and had been architecturally inscribed in the theatres, commentators on early music hall agree that paid performers were largely a prompt for the customers themselves to sing, to ensure that the expecting conviviality and camaraderie of a night drinking was achieved. An interesting example of usage of "entertainment" from 1883 seems to demonstrate how the word retains an association with hospitality granted the spectator, while also indicating how it was beginning to refer to a specific cultural form:

> "The proprietor of an inn .. undertakes to provide for the entertainment of all comers"[33] ("the action of treating as a guest").

It is quite a short step in conceptualisation from that to the following usage (in fact from 1881, two years previously), which refers to the legislation which increasingly was demanding that taverns offering performances be licensed: "Davenant succeeded in procuring permission from the Protector... to give what would now be called entertainments"[34] ("a public performance."). Rather dramatically, this quote indicates how closely this usage of the word was politically tied to the process of constituting and forming a stable, tangible and identifiable working class culture.

In effect, for the tavern owners to introduce paid performers into the taverns was a way of exploiting the tavern's traditional image of friendliness, as well as its reputation for wild, reckless, and carefree behaviour, and making it a marketable commodity. Thus, an advertisement for the "Garrick's Head", from around the 1840's, reads as follows:

> "Gentlemen visiting London will do themselves a moral wrong, and will merit the censure of their friends at home, if they go back to the provinces without being able to say to their enquiring connections that they have witnessed the extraordinary entertainments provided for the interlection of the convivial in the magnificent saloon of the above–named hotel."[35].

The linguistic context within which the word *entertainment* is used here indicates something of the ornate and novel quality it had at this time, in being used to

refer to performance. In fact, the most common term used to refer to popular performances at this time was still **Amusement**.

Amusement was a loose term that was not exclusively associated with spectatorship, for example the rules to The Mansion of Bliss (1810) – "The game is played with a tetotum, marked 1,2,3,4; and from two to twelve persons may join in the amusement"[36]. But toward the later half of the century, as debates around the morality and social desirability of working class entertainment forms (most notably the music hall) began to flourish, the word increasingly took on the specialised meaning relating to performance within a developing discourse. Thus, in 1861, the title of a conference by the London Working Men's College was The Amusement Question[37]. A statement more clearly marked as bourgeois from the Contemporary Review in 1878 indicates the kind of assumptions that lay under these debates, within which leisure was beginning to be seen as the privileged space within which one's worth and one's true identity became visible, and as the crucial area within which the proletariat could be managed: "There is hardly any other method [of social reform]...to which greater importance should be attributed than to the providing of good moral public amusements"[38].

The appropriateness of *amusements* to refer to lower class performances is clear: it represents one dramatic tradition as frivolous, worthless, easy, helping to highlight the meanings increasingly being ascribed to middle class theatre – respectable, serious, moral, uplifting, aesthetic – culture for the truly 'cultured'. But *amusements* was descriptive of a range of activities, and not just those of the working class (I've already quoted the instructions from an eminently middle class, respectable, and moral board game). From a bourgeois point of view, *amusements* did not immediately refer to an area of cultural practice which, it could be assumed, had no part in the life of the speaker, an area that was naturally separate from and opposed to respectable culture, in the way that *entertainment* began to toward the end of the century.

Two final examples of usage might serve to indicate how closely this process was related to the intensification of significance attributed to and invested in the

pleasure of the working class. One of the London reform groups who were among the many groups trying to, as it were, 'clear up' what were seen as the dangerous elements of performance was called the People's Entertainment Society[39] (in 1879). A rather more remarkable statement comes from Punch, in 1892, which ironically refers to this reforming zeal, showing an officious representative of the London County Council remonstrate to a representative of the music halls as follows:

> "I cannot too often repeat that we are here to fulfil the mission entrusted to us by the Democracy, which will no longer tolerate in its entertainments anything that is either vulgar, silly or offensive in the slightest degree."[40]

The humour arising from this quotation appears to derive at least in part from an assumed recognition that it is in the nature of entertainment to contain vulgarity, silliness, offensiveness. The reformer is trying to make entertainment cease to be entertaining.

My aim, in this opening section, is not only to introduce something of the package of meaning that the word *entertainment* carries with it, but also to posit the historical specificity of this package, and give a sense of the struggles going on within the language used in cultural debate during a period when some of the central characteristics of modern popular culture were developing. We have seen Dyer's bold but maybe rather reckless claim that, prior to capitalism, class difference was not reflected in different types of performance. The validity of this argument is somewhat out of the range of this thesis. But it is demonstrable that, in Britain, a remarkable set of changes took place in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, going along with the evolution of social class during this period, relating to the use that was made of cultural activity by representatives of different classes. I believe that this process involved the construction of a new discursive formation that is central to the project of this thesis.

In order to look at this discursive formation more closely, and to explore some of the political dynamics involved in these developments, I would like to give some attention to some of the printed material relating to the evolving music hall in the early

nineteenth century. This material is useful in that it represents a rare source for demonstrating the conceptualisations of entertainment during the gradual emergence of a culture industry of the sort described by Adorno. Because of the disrespectable and somewhat secretive nature of some of the forms of entertainment prefiguring the music hall proper, source material is scarce.

However, a few documents survive from this period, informally and privately printed and distributed, and a reading of these documents may be as close as we can get to hearing the language used to describe these amusements, capturing a moment prior to the institutionalisation of the music hall as a culture industry, of the type described by Adorno, providing mainstream entertainment for a general audience. As an industry, the music hall constructed the urbanised working class as consumers of entertainment. Prior to the full realisation of this development, archival documents describe a practice and a discourse around entertainment that, in contrast, is much more specialised in relation to its audience.

Among the most remarkable of these documents is The Swells Night Guide (1841), which was a privately printed book, written by an anonymous apparent member of the aristocracy ("The Hon F.L.G.")[41]. We might take this book as one of the earliest examples of a listings magazine – a kind of Victorian Time Out – and it is particularly interesting in that it gives a fascinating picture of the nature of the 'song and supper' rooms of the time, that led to the development of the music hall proper. It gives details of places of entertainment in London, and encourages the reader to make the most of the city's nightlife, all the time underpinned by an assumption that a rich life involves constant amusement. The author's introduction demonstrates this tone:

> "The present work is compiled by a man of fashion; who spent a fortune in pursuit of the meretricious pleasures which are alone to be found in London, confessedly the noblest capital in the known world. The intention of the Editor speaks for itself. The Swells Night Guide contains no lectures staid as starch, inserted as bugbears to frighten youth from participating in the good things of this world; on the contrary, it will be found to conduct its readers to scenes and

delights which for brilliance and splendour eclipse the fabled palaces of the Arabian Magi."[42]

It is notable that The Swells Night Guide uses the term "entertainment" often, and (from a modern viewpoint) in a recognisable way. Thus, in describing "The Keans Head", the author claims:

"Hudson, the celebrated comic singer... fully established its reputation for conviviality and excellent singing. It has lost none of its laurels for such entertainment in the hands of its present proprietor"[43]

Similarly, we are told that "The Monday nights at the "Town" are devoted to a novel species of entertainment (gratuitous) called 'Judge and Jury Clubs'"[44]. And of "The Marylebone", the author writes that "the locality can support a theatre; and if the entertainments are good, there is little doubt it will"[45].

What is remarkable about the concept of "entertainment", as in The Swells Night Guide, is that it is constructed very deliberately as specific to the aristocracy. In particular, the book constructs a very clear picture of the ideal life to be led by men of leisure. The concept of entertainment is central to this picture. Thus, the relative luxuriousness of different venues is of crucial interest to the author, who is essentially concerned as to whether the places he describes can cater adequately to an upper class clientele. Thus, in discussing "The Albion", he writes: "The Coffee Room is a most spacious, lofty and elegantly fitted apartment, lighted with innumerable chandeliers, and containing every comfort that can be wished for in a house of public entertainment"[46]. Whereas "The Surrey" is "exclusively devoted to the gratification of the lower order, and has a nightly audience of a truly motley description"[47].

However, The Swells Night Guide does not present a picture of two completely separate fields of entertainment – one for the upper and one for the working class. On the contrary, the picture that emerges from the book is more of a sense of excitement, for members of the aristocracy, in being able to enter into a working class environment. Thus, of "The Rookery", the author describes:

"a large room, where a pretty specimen of low life and high chaff may be

witnessed and heard. It is generally filled with cabmen, thieves of all ranks, cadgers, fighting men, flash mechanics, and low doxies. We have often thought how a gentleman would stare... about him, to find himself in a house of this description at four o'clock in the morning... Yet this scene may be actually witnessed, and is well worth the inconvenience of inspection."[48]

This aristocratic response to working class culture contrasts strongly with the more typically (in this period) middle class response, characterised by moral censure, superiority, and suspicion. Something of the flavour of this can be gained by another book printed under similarly private circumstances as The Swells Night Guide. This book, The Dens of London Exposed[49], printed in 1835 with no author credited, takes a somewhat prurient yet disapproving look at London's working class night–life. From this perspective, the same world that is viewed with such delight in the Guide is seen completely differently:

"..the best specimens were the street singers, that ragged squalling class. A dirty, tattered, coarse–featured wench, whose visits from the cadging house could only be varied to the gin shop and pawn shop, came singing and dancing in, rocking her body to and fro... She footed away vigorously,to drive away care, seconding every caper with a shout, and 'Jack's the lad', and slapping her body, and leg, in rather an unlady–like style. After giving her legs a proper shaking, she laid her head a little on one side, and moving it, with her foot to keep time, screamed out, in tones both loud and shrill

One lovely morning as I was walking
In the merry month of May...

She was the real songstress of low life; Vulgarity might have taken her by the hand"[50]

This very precise and detailed picture of "vulgarity" is essential for the moral viewpoint of this text, because it needs something to define respectability against. And this polarity is also central to The Swells Night Guide. The night–life of London is portrayed as a kind of fantasy land where, unlike in the world of respectability,

anything is allowed, all dreams can come true, and every whim can be catered for. The secretive and hidden nature of this world is further demonstrated by the fact that the authors of both The Swells Night Guide and The Dens of London Exposed chose to remain anonymous.

A central theme of the Guide is the concern the author shows for helping his readers to enter this paradise safely. Thus, the introduction claims that the book will "enable him [the reader] to know the bon vivant from the rum bubber, the gentleman from the gammoner, the coachman from the cadger... and prime coves of every description from priggers of all sorts"[51]. The implication here is that it is important to know which working class people are docile, ready to cater to the aristocrat, and which working class people may represent a threat. Understandably, the book is characterised by a kind of fear, that requires of suitable establishments that they afford some protection to their upper class clientele. Thus, of "Joys Hotel":

> "Its orgies commence soon after the termination of the performances at the different places of amusement; and consist chiefly of songs, glees, duets, imitations, recitations, catches, &c, &c. The chair is always occupied by the landlord himself, who is extremely urbane to strangers, but rigidly excludes persons of an improper and suspicious character. Of course we need not mention that ladies are not allowed."[52]

This is a particularly interesting statement for another reason, in that there is a clear distinction made between the performances, and the singing by the clientele. It is important to note that the orgies referred to here are not sexual activities, but participative singing within an all–male group. Nevertheless, we know from other sources (as well as from The Swells Night Guide itself) that the songs at the 'song and supper' rooms were highly sexual in nature. Some of these songs were also privately printed, and have been reprinted in facsimile in Bawdy Songs of the Early Music Hall, edited by George Speaight[53]. These songs are characterised by a startling explicitness, which might be guessed at from some of their titles, which include: "There's somebody coming"; "Johnny's Lump"; "He'll no more grind again"; "There is no shove like the

first shove"; "The way to come over a maid"; "The W–Hole of the Ladies" (a number of these songs are parodies of respectable songs of the time). As Speaight points out, as music hall "developed by the middle of the century into a place of public entertainment, with the singing much more prominent than the drinking, songs as outspoken as this had to be banished"[54]. As an entertainment industry was developing, there was a need for the product to be acceptable to a broad range of consumers, and not a specifically male audience. It is also the case that the music hall was subject to legal constraints around respectability and decency that the aristocratic and relatively private arena of the 'song and supper' rooms had avoided. Thus, Speaight quotes a commentator from 1872 (thirty years after The Swells Night Guide was printed):

> "How long ago is it since gentlemen of the highest degree went to the Cider Cellars and the Coal Hole?... We trundle back through the seasons, to the time when the bar parlour of the Cider Cellars – a dirty, stifling, underground tavern in Maiden Lane, behind the Strand – was the meeting place from Fop's Alley, after the opera. The Cave of Harmony was a cellar for shameful song–singing – where members of both Houses, the pick of the Universities, and the bucks of the Row, were content to dwell in indecencies for ever."[55]

To return to The Swells Night Guide, it is clear that what the author is praising at "Joys Hotel" is the opportunity for communal involvement in bawdiness and raucous behaviour, among men, in a safe way. The sense of belonging and of involvement is central to the conception of entertainment that it relies on so heavily. The Swells Night Guide lays this out this notion of community very explicitly as a commodity to be bought. Entertainment, in this context, is a means by which members of the aristocracy can feel fraternity and a sense of belonging.

This perspective on leisure time, specifically addressed to the aristocracy in the Guide, was to become increasingly general throughout the nineteenth century, during which time there was a drive by the leisure industries always to turn participants into consumers. This transformation is central to the development of an industry based on

providing entertainment. Dyer points out two central characteristics of entertainment that are of interest here. Firstly, he points out that "somebody else actually puts the show on. If you make the entertainment then it is not entertainment for you"[56]. Secondly, he points out that entertainment is "something you pay for... essentially entertainment is treated as a service, something to be bought on the market"[57]. The Guide records a point in the history of British leisure activities where a particular tradition of group singing is becoming a commodity that is bought separately, rather than an accompaniment to a night out drinking. At this point, vulgarity – in the form of a sense of community, freedom, and celebration - is commodified into entertainment.

This process is illuminated by one final aspect of the Guide that I would like to draw out, which is maybe the most immediately striking feature of the book. The pleasures that it directs its readers to are not exclusively based around drinking, singing, and performance. In fact, a larger part of the book is devoted to prostitution. What is most remarkable about this, is that these are not seen as two separate activities – performances, drinking, and prostitution are all seen as different diversions, different forms of entertainment. Thus, the famous Cyder Cellars are described as follows:

> "This is another house of entertainment under the management of another member of the numerous family of the Rhodes. The amusements of the place consist of songs, glees, catches, and the usual description of entertainment to be found after nightfall."[58]

Similarly, "The Bower" is described as "worth seeing, in consequence of the numerous servant maids and nursery girls who attend it. We may be singular in our taste, but we do aver, that there is much beauty amongst this class of person"[59], and of the "New Strand Theatre" it is stated that it "is now, and ever has been, since it first opened, a famous place of rendezvous with ladies of a certain reputation"[60]. The author is remarkably candid:

> "It is our intention in this section of 'The Guide' to present a list of the most beautiful women in London, their names and residences – whether kept in

private, or trading on 'their own bottoms', &c and so interspersed with anecdote, as to be highly amusing. This will prove of use to men of all classes, who, though possessed of the desire and the means, yet lack a knowledge of the 'whereabouts' to get a supply of goods, which has, from time immemorial, been called contraband."[61]

And despite this claim to address its advice to "men of all classes", in fact the class–specific nature of this text is clear just as much in relation to its discussion of brothels, as in its discussion of 'song and supper' rooms:

"The proprietor demands One Shilling before entrance, for which a refreshment ticket is given. This arrangement excludes many improper persons who would otherwise go there to the annoyance of the Swell"[62]

Certainly the lack of distinction made by the author between entertainment as such and prostitution, is facilitated by the fact that the distinction between female performers and prostitutes was frequently blurred. The Guide makes much of this:

"It is a fact widely known that Actresses are in greater demand amongst men of gallantry, than any other class of woman whatever. To gain the favour and companionship of an Actress, some little tact is required. A direct offer of money would, in nine cases out of ten, defeat the object you had in view."[63]

The role of prostitution in Victorian society is discussed in an article by E.M. Sigsworth and T.J. Wyke[64]. In this article, they discuss the high incidence of prostitution in Victorian Britain, especially London, and the perception of this by Victorian commentators. While it is hard to gain objective empirical evidence as to the levels of prostitution, many Victorian commentators thought that it was increasing, and during this period concern grew over the perceived moral dangers of prostitution. It seems clear that this was largely to do with the greater visibility of prostitution, notably within the emergent music hall, and the respectable middle class suspicion around entertainment was frequently associated with outrage at immoral or vulgar behaviour on the part of women. Sigsworth and Wyke quote from Acton, writing in 1870, warning of the risk of respectable women attending "public–house amusements" and

witnessing "the vicious and profligate sisterhood flaunting it gaily... accepting all the attentions of men, freely plied with liquor, sitting in the best places, dressed far above their station, with plenty of money to spend and denying themselves no amusement or enjoyment, encumbered with no domestic ties, and burdened with no children... this actual superiority of a loose life could not have escaped the attention of the quick–witted sex"[65]. This sense of a contrast between prostitutes and respectable women plays a role in the increasing significance of a polarity between vulgarity and respectability that helped to identify the music hall with a sense of freedom - one of the key aspects of which was the sexual freedom and lack of restraint.

While it is hard to gather objective empirical evidence as to whether the extent of prostitution did increase in Britain during the nineteenth century, it does seem clear that it did become an increasingly organised and structured commercial industry, in need of a market, and the early music halls were perhaps the most central arena for the operation of this market. Sigsworth and Wyke relate this to the development of pornography into an established industry, partly facilitated by technological advances in printing that enabled the reproduction of pornographic pictures and photographs, that essentially catered to the middle and upper classes (like the Swells Guide)[66]. As for prostitution itself, while Victorian commentators were mainly concerned with its use by middle class men, it does seem to be the case that working class men made use of prostitution as well – Sigsworth and Wyke particularly associate this with the growth of beer–houses in the 1830s. Nevertheless, the class dynamics involved in nineteenth century prostitution are obvious:

> "It is difficult to resist the impression that prostitution resolved itself into a physical expression of the class structure of Victorian society. While all the available evidence points to a supply of prostitutes drawn from the working classes, the demand upon which contemporary opinion concentrated came from the wealthier classes of society. Working–class men contributed to demand, but middle- or upper-class women hardly contributed to supply."[67]

The Swells Night Guide is situated in the middle of the process, its mode of entertainment being formed in association with this availability of working class women. Thus, it contrives to construct sexual desire as a need to be met by the consumption of a commodity. This parallels the process we have described already, where the "song and supper" rooms become a space within which the sense of belonging to a community can be bought. Two forms of social interaction become commercialised and commodified. In the case of prostitution, the commodity made available is a period of time spent with a woman, or women. On the other hand, the "song and supper" rooms offer an all-male (or male dominated) community as an environment one can buy participation in. Both of these environments are heavily characterised by a sense of freedom, of anything being allowed, that is constructed in opposition to respectability ("no lectures staid as starch", as the author says in his introduction). An essential aspect of this sense of liberation is that the book enables the upper class reader to enter the working class world, allowing him to both control and feel a sense of belonging to this environment. Because of this, the sense of community the book relies on is deeply ambivalent - on the one hand the separation between classes appears to dissolve, on the other it is affirmed more clearly than ever.

Thus, the Swells Night Guide records a historical point when both sexual behaviour and a sense of community are commodified, and made available for sale to an upper class male audience. The exclusivity of this construction of "entertainment" contrasts strongly with the concern of an established show business industry to broaden the range of its spectators. These amusements are not light entertainment in a modern sense, although we can see in them the development of a modern discourse around entertainment, within which it is seen as a commodity that can be bought to meet our human needs for warmth, companionship and pleasure.

The development of music hall itself, from these early roots, is one of marketing this sense of luxury, of freedom, of community and of laughter more widely, bringing it into the reach of the people as a whole, allowing working class men and, increasingly, women to meet this constructed "need" for entertainment. Effectively, an

entertainment industry was succeeding in expanding its market and broadening its consumer base.

Urbanisation, industrialisation and increasingly heavy exploitation of the working class led to the fracturing and disruption of traditional expressions of community – as witnessed by the gradual elimination of traditional popular festivals over the course of the century by factory owners.[67a] In association with this, a modern working class lifestyle was developing, based around alienation from labour, with little sense of communality. In this context, it became possible to sell community to the working class themselves. Thus, the music hall developed as an essentially popular form.

In this context, the importance of the "swell" song in the development of the music hall is extremely interesting[68]. Probably the most dominant music hall type during the 1860s and 1870s, the swell of these songs was precisely the swell of The Swells Night Guide, transformed into a model of a lifestyle for all men to live up to. Figures such as George Leybourne and Alfred Vance, in songs such as "Champagne Charlie" held out a promise of luxury and the high life. As Bailey, in his analysis of the swell songs, puts it: "within the ancient conceit of the common man as king for the day – or lord for the night – the swell song transcended the short–run gratifications of the traditional good time and offered its own sensational vision of a more permanent world of progress and plenty"[69]. However, it is important to recognise that this promise is held out in a way which is comic, and does not question or threaten social inequality. The swell songs appear to glory in a world of plenty, within which the swell is admired by women, and revels in drink. However, there is a huge contrast between these songs and those of the 'song and supper' rooms with their exclusively male clientele. As Bailey points out, "the swell's relations with women are far from predatory"[70] – in these songs, the swell does not make sexual conquests, instead, he exists within a utopian world where everything is done for fun. Bailey states that:

> "the swell song exploited the tensions generated by the ambiguities and oppositions of class, status, gender and generation... Most songs... could be read

in ways that excited a variety of cross–cutting responses."[71]

Thus, the swell songs were so successful because they successfully negotiated a space where everybody in the audience could laugh. By being saucy rather than pornographic (in contrast to the songs reprinted in Speaight's book) they have the capacity to attract both female and respectable middle class spectators. They achieved a form of consensus that is central to entertainment, where conflicts and confrontations appear to be dissolved. This was to be the task of music hall for the rest of the nineteenth century. For example, Jane Traies' article "Jones and the Working Girl: Class Marginality in Music–Hall Song 1860–1900"[72] looks at two more music hall "types" which became of increasing importance after the hey–day of the "swell" and played a central role in making the music hall increasingly attractive to a lower–middle class audience. This reflects the rapid growth of the lower middle class in Britain from about 1870, and the fact that it was increasingly becoming possible to change class status, due to the growth of education, industry and commerce.

The first of these types (which Traies refers to as "Jones" as so many of the characters in these songs have this name) is of a lower middle class socially aspirant young man. The comic songs based around this figure highlight the social gaffes he makes, and his unsuccessful attempts to be cultivated and proper. These songs "explored the social vulnerability of those on the class margins"[73]. However, Traies argues that the songs allow do not appear to explore the anxieties of Jones from an external position – instead, as the anxieties associated with upward social mobility, are aired the audience have the opportunity to ridicule polite society, or to laugh with recognition at the difficulties of engaging in it. In many ways these songs appear to celebrate Jones and his world. Thus, music hall is offering a space for aspirant working class and lower middle class people to laugh at their own difficulties.

The other type Traies looks at is the figure of the working girl – typically featuring in comic songs centred around the difficulties facing young working class (or lower middle class) women who work for a living. Again, this would represent an increasing percentage of the music hall audience during the second half of the

nineteenth century. A common scenario involves a man unsuccessfully trying to seduce a young woman as she serves him at her place of work (examples include waitresses and shop assistants). According to Traies, the success of this type was again due to its openness to a plurality of responses:

> "The figure of the working girl offered the music–hall audience a variety of levels of response. Women could enjoy her cleverness, vivacity, and independence; men of all classes had the consolation of a problem or humiliation aired and shared."[74]

The increasing respectability of the music hall during the nineteenth century is certainly associated with a commercial need to address itself to a female, and therefore a family, audience. This process can be related to the increasing separation between the providing of alcohol and the providing of entertainment. During this period, pubs and music halls became two very different kinds of establishment, where – in the first half of the century – they had been indistinguishable.[74a] And if the music hall did manage to achieve a high level of accessibility to women, this was enabled by the maintenance of the pub as a specifically male space.

This history is looked at by Valerie Hey, in her book Patriarchy and Pub Culture[75], which explores the role of the pub in British society from the nineteenth century to the present day. For Hey, the pub played a central role in defining relations between the genders in Victorian Britain. In particular it represented a place where men demonstrated their freedom from the domestic sphere, and their ability to purchase 'leisure'. As against this, women were tied to, and defined in relation to their home. Hey explores the role the pub played within conflicts between the genders in Victorian Britain, suggesting that "Victorian working class women both resented and challenged the power of the pub over the men and their income"[76], and in particular looks at the way in which female involvement in the temperance movement was often precisely a struggle over income and social freedom. The bar acted as a site of male privilege. Hey suggests that bars were (and are) set up as "female substitutes – offering plenitude, availability, warmth, food, and companionship, a servicing of male

needs"[77]. This is amplified by the role of the barmaid – Hey explains how the physical layout of bars can "set up a natural 'stage' with the voyeur in the front stalls"[78].

It might be accurate, then, to view the second half of the nineteenth century as a period where a specific tradition split off into two directions – one of which continued to cater essentially to men, and one of which began to expand its appeal to both genders, by reaching towards respectability. In order to look briefly at some of the middle class concerns about this, I will refer to one final piece of archive material. J. Ewing Ritchie's The Night Side of London[79] was printed in 1857, a couple of decades after The Dens of London Exposed and The Swells Night Guide. At this point, middle class concern in working class leisure activities was growing, and Ritchie is extremely explicit about his reasons for this interest:

> "I know little of the individual by merely witnessing him toiling for his daily bread. I must follow him home, I must be with him in his hours of relaxation; I must listen to the songs he sings and the jokes he tells; I must see what is his idea of pleasure, and thus only can I get at the man as he is... There are poor miserable philosophers indeed, and guilty of an enormous blunder, who, in their investigation into the moral and social conditions of the people, refuse to notice the amusements of the people in their hours of gaiety and ease."[80]

This importance placed on leisure time and its meaning, leads Ritchie to a position from which he is able to assess the relative morality and depravity, the relative safety and danger, of the establishments he visits. Thus he describes Canterbury Hall as follows:

> "Every one is smoking, and every one has a glass before him; but the class that come here are economical, and chiefly confine themselves to pipes and porter. The presence of the ladies has also a beneficial effect; I see no indication of intoxication, and certainly none of the songs are obscene."[81]

Ritchie is certainly sympathetic to the working class, but has a strong sense of needing to protect them from themselves – he inhabits a world within which respectability and vulgarity are in constant conflict. He approaches the working class,

in fact, with a proselytising tendency, a sense of mission around helping them to gain respectability, and to engage in rational leisure activities. Thus, continuing his discussion of the Canterbury:

> "I may think that more rational amusement might be found than by sitting smoking and drinking in a large room on a hot summer's night. I may have my doubts whether all go home sober – the presence of a policeman in the room indicated that at times there was need for his services – but I believe the association of song and drinking and amusements pernicious in the extreme; and knowing that man needs relaxation – that he must have his hour of amusement as well as of work – I cannot too earnestly press upon the advocates of Temperance reform the desirableness of their out–bidding the public–house in the attempts to cater for the entertainment of the people.."[82]

So what meanings are attached to the concept of entertainment for Ritchie, writing at a point just when an industry based around its production is becoming established, stabilised, and secure, in the form of the music halls? From his liberal standpoint, it seems clear that the working class have a right to, and a need for entertainment. It would be unjust for the working class not to have this need met. This was an increasingly general viewpoint, in the second half of the nineteenth century, and much working class struggle was based on this sense of a right to leisure time[83].

Even for Ritchie, the leisure time of the working class is seen to be fraught with danger. Entertainment needs to be closely watched, constantly monitored – just as the Canterbury needs to be held in check and kept in order by the presence of a policeman. Popular entertainment constantly threatens to break the bounds of respectability, of the propriety it has an uneasy alliance with. Vulgarity, obscenity, improper behaviour constantly threaten to break through.

The development of the halls, in fact, involved a complex and continual re–negotiation of the nature of its address to the audience, as this audience became more diverse in terms of class and gender. One of the central aspects of this constant re–

negotiation was the need for entertainment to provide a sense of freedom from constraint, but for this to be constantly tamed just at the point where it threatens to break into vulgarity – into open expressions of sexuality or of class identity. Entertainment becomes a privileged arena within which struggles between the genders and the classes are played out.

Entertainment, of course, came to be a central word for the entertainment industry itself, during the twentieth century. For us now this seems the most familiar and common usage of the term – our understanding of entertainment is hard to disentangle from the specific ways in which the concept of entertainment is constructed by the leisure industries. This construction, so taken for granted and unquestioned, arises from a long period (from the early twentieth century to the present day) within which there was an explicit and ubiquitous promotion of entertainment that took place within performance, film, and later television. Hollywood, of course, played a key role in mobilising this construction in order to sell its own productions.

It is interesting that the Oxford English Dictionary doesn't give a example of the word in anything like this usage until the supplement (the original dictionary was printed from 1884–1928, the supplement in 1933 and 1972) – giving examples from 1904 "A prince among provincial entertainment–mongers of the humbler order" and 1937 "Gives the books a high entertainment–value"[84]. Of course, the frequent usage of the word with this precise meaning in The Swells Night Guide precedes this by half a century. With its complex set of meanings, the term and concept of entertainment is crucial for the way in which modern popular culture defines itself.

ENTERTAINMENT AND FILM STUDIES

This eytymological investigation might prompt us to consider whether light entertainment – a cultural practice not only perceived as trivial, but named as such ('light') – is a politically defensible categorisation. The answer to such a question would, clearly, have a crucial bearing on the project of studying popular culture. Some of the early classic texts of this field, for example Hall and Whannel's The Popular Arts, and within film studies work such as Perkins' Film as Film (to a lesser extent), contrive to dissolve the perceived difference between high and low cultural forms[1]. Within this context the analysis of a television programme, for example, is equivalent to validating its inclusion within the realms of the serious and the worthwhile.

This more or less explicit, and slightly defensive, desire to make popular culture respectable has been far less of a general feature of film studies since this time. However, the ways in which analysis of film developed during the seventies tended to produce work that didn't address the issue of the lack of intensity and discrimination that is seen as characteristic of the spectatorship of entertainment. Are we to believe that entertainment demands less attention than art? And if this is the case, would this affect analysis of these texts?

This development of close textual analysis of film might be seen as within the vanguard of the study of popular culture at this time. While it was largely the result of a specific adoption of a structuralist approach (being indebted to work by, for example, Barthes and Eco, both of whom had articles in Screen during the seventies[2]), it also can be seen to have connections with a longer tradition of literary stylistic analysis. Many of the most valuable and important texts within film studies at this time, covering a huge range of approaches from Bellour's psychoanalytic breakdown of gender as articulated in films such as Marnie, to Wollen's narrative breakdown of North by Northwest (based on Propp's formalist approach to the folk tale), are examples of analyses that rely on a detailed attention to the minutiae of the text, as though holding onto the notion of an ideal reading

that could be produced which, perceiving everything, would produce an accurate and absolute reading of the film[3].

This is not to denigrate the value of such work, or to deny its progressive and radical nature, resulting from the political positions and intentions informing it. In any case, it would have been necessary for film studies to have refuted the notion that in some way the spectator of one group of texts could avoid spectatorial work; within a structuralist perspective this is naive. Nevertheless, work that began to affirm a specificity of entertainment, and to take account of the ways in which it is distinct, can be seen as leading toward a more radical break from some early British work in the field of popular culture – such as Richard Hoggart's Uses of Literacy, Victor Perkins' Film as Film, and *auteur*–based film studies by writers such as Robin Wood – which seems to have as its eventual political aim (whether this was intentional or not) the relocation of entertainment into the realms of the respectable and the culturally worthwhile[4]. In order to demonstrate this, I now want to discuss Richard Dyer's approach to the Hollywood musical, in an article which claimed to speak about "entertainment as entertainment"[5].

We have already seen how Dyer's PhD thesis (for the Birmingham Centre of Cultural Studies, submitted in '72), from which I quoted in the last section, insisted on the historical specificity of the distinction between art and entertainment. Much of the detailed work of this thesis was later condensed into a short but influential article. "Entertainment and Utopia", printed in Movie in Spring, 1977, represented an important problematisation of the term 'entertainment', which it saw as a tangible function of popular culture that needed to be taken account of in analysis[6]. The project it is involved in might be seen as an attempt at a re–mobilisation of the term within film studies.

Dyer takes the conventional understanding of entertainment, seen as 'escape' and 'wish–fulfillment', an understanding seen as largely irrelevant by and having little place in the field of film studies up to this time, and takes them as indications of what is, in fact, (for Dyer) "its central thrust", namely utopianism. By this, he does not mean that

entertainment relies, in satisfying its audience, on the representation of models of possible utopian worlds; rather, it is utopian in feeling: "It presents, head–on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organised."[7] This is comparable to Adorno's concept of the false promise entertainment sets up, but takes a more positive approach to this. For Dyer, entertainment grants the spectator a tangible moment of escape from life's difficulties into a world of gratification.

Entertainment's capacity for allowing the spectator to escape the constraints of the real world, while conventionally recognised, tends to be taken for granted. Dyer recognises that the concept of entertainment - the construction of what it is and what it does - is determined and produced primarily by the show–business/entertainment industries themselves, within entertainment texts. The refusal to question the nature of entertainment further is in fact essential to institutional discourses, such as Hollywood publicity, which relies on reinforcing an assumption that films are a natural complement to everyday life. It is also central to most external positions, including the conventional left–wing attack on the media which sees it as almost magically appeasing and placating its audience (as we have discussed). Dyer quotes Enzensberger's refutation of this:

> "The electronic media do not owe their irresistable power to any sleight–of–hand but to the elemental power of deep social needs.. Consumption as spectacle contains the promise that want will disappear. The deceptive, brutal and obscene features of this festival derive from the fact that there can be no question of a real fulfilment of its promise."[8]

Going further, Dyer wants to emphasise "the history of signs themselves as they are produced in culture and history"[9]. Dyer's insistence on placing entertainment within a specific history – "I feel that film analysis remains notoriously non–historical"[10] – prompts him to question precisely what is being celebrated by the joyousness of entertainment. Produced by the show–business industry, placed within capitalist economy, entertainment nevertheless contains an "implicit struggle":

> "Just as [show business] does not simply 'give the people what they want' (since it actually defines those wants), so, as a relatively autonomous mode of cultural production, it does not simply reproduce unproblematically patriarchal–capitalist ideology. Indeed, it is precisely on seeming to achieve both these often opposed functions simultaneously that its survival largely depends."[11]

The way entertainment deals with this, according to Dyer, is in only acknowledging a specific and limited set of wants – he lists five categories of "entertainment's utopian sensiblities" – energy, abundance, intensity, transparency (by which Dyer means a sense of sincerity and openness), and community – each of which he demonstrates at work in three Hollywood musicals, and each of which can be related to "specific inadequacies in society". Dyer suggests, with regard to these utopian solutions, that "with the exception perhaps of community (the most directly working class in source), the ideals of entertainment imply wants that capitalism itself promises to meet"[12]. He specifies areas that entertainment refuses to (or does not have the capacity to) deal with – "no mention of class, race or patriarchy. That is, while entertainment is responding to needs that are real, at the same time it is also defining and delimiting what constitute the legitimate needs of people in our society."[13]

Dyer's hint at the possible uneasiness around the category of community, as a promise that cannot be met is worth highlighting. A sense of community might be raised within narrative feature films, particularly in the communal viewing condition of a large cinema. However, this promise may become even more central to entertainment texts such as television game shows involving a high level of participation from the general public, direct address from the host to the spectator, and the inscription of the audience into the text as a central aspect (notably through audience shots and through a laughter track). These texts might be seen to represent most ambitious attempt to construct a community and make it available to us as entertainment. The heavily overdetermined image of community that characterises such texts is ironic given the domestic viewing

conditions under which, as individuals or family groups, involvement in a wider community is in fact kept from us. This contrasts with the viewing conditions of cinema, in which we may, to some limited extent, form some kind of bond with our fellow spectators through taking part in a shared experience.

Precisely what makes musicals the films that most significantly express utopianism (though Dyer's entries for westerns and TV news in the table represent a rather tentative attempt to broaden the scope of the analysis) is the separation between the plot and the musical numbers, which Dyer sees as revealing the conflict between realism and utopianism – "In most musicals, the narrative represents things as they are, to be escaped from"[14]. (Here Dyer is not using the term realism to refer to a set of stylistic devices, but simply to distinguish the plot from the numbers). The conventional structural breakdown of musicals into narrative and spectacle, seen as working against each other, is here being used in order to associate as it were a pure form of entertainment with those moments when narrativity appears to be absent. These moments, Dyer claims, by functioning in structural opposition to the narrative, become privileged bearers of the utopian sensibilities he identifies. Returning to the "deeply contradictory nature" of entertainment forms, he now locates this within the structure of entertainment forms themselves, rather than simply in their industrial context of production:

> "In variety, the essential contradiction is between comedy and music turns; in musicals, it is between the narrative and the numbers. Both these contradictions can be rendered as one between the heavily representational and verisimilitudinous (pointing to the way the world is, drawing on the audience's concrete experience of the world) and the heavily non–representational and 'unreal' (pointing to how things could be better)."[15]

It is characteristic of seventies film theory that Dyer sees his analysis as revealing a kind of saving radical element in the films he discusses. Thus, he claims that "to draw attention to the gap between what is and what could be is, ideologically speaking, playing

with fire". Having assigned an ideological task to musicals, which is "to work through these contradictions at all levels in such a way as to 'manage' them, to make them seem to disappear..", he asserts that "they don't always succeed"[16]. In a sense this seems appropriate and reasonable – he has after all seen the production of entertainment as deeply marked by struggle between "capital (the backers) and labour (the performers)". On the other hand, we might well feel suspicious of this desire to identify radical content in Hollywood films, even more so now that we can locate this tendency of Dyer's within the general trajectory of film studies in the seventies.

Given the thrust of cultural studies during this period, it is not surprising that Dyer's work increasingly concentrated on Hollywood films. In fact Dyer made a rather unsuccessful attempt to use the same theoretical model to look at television entertainment. His short BFI Television Monograph, from '73, concludes rather sadly that "television entertainment does not seem to have evolved forms which link the expression of the utopia of entertainment to the present situation of the audience"[17], and adds that there is no equivalent to Stanley Donen's work in the field of TV, which might indicate (disappointingly) that one of his aims in "Entertainment and Utopia" was simply to confirm and reassert that Donen really was one of the 'great' producers (it's worth noting that Movie's general approach to film analysis tended towards auteurism). While popular genre cinema creates a certain degree of difficulty for analysis that relies on assumptions of individual creativity and discrete textuality, though we have seen how Dyer does tend to avoid this, such difficulties appear to be overwhelming in attempts at a similar approach to TV. For film studies in general, the narrative form of film, and its commodified mode of consumption, made it easily analysable in terms of discrete individual texts, whose

structure had merely to be unwrapped in order for the truth about the pleasures they provided and the ideologies they affirmed to become clear. Above this approach, the concept of genre could be employed to explore intertextual readings. To a large extent, the field of study has opened out since this time, since it has become clear how deceptive dealing with the film industry on its own is.

ENTERTAINMENT AND IDENTITY

The fact of middle class repression of and suspicion of popular culture in the early nineteenth century, a process that appears to be associated with the formation of the concept of entertainment, suggests an approach that would examine whether entertainment, in fact, posed (or poses) any kind of political threat; whether entertainment, or the forms it derived from, were connected with or constituted a mode of resistance. On the other hand, if institutions such as Hollywood can be seen to celebrate entertainment (even if this is rather a contradictory celebration) at the expense of art, we might well afford to be wary of positing any such connection. It could of course be argued that Hollywood developed a cultural form that could articulate an innate celebrational impulse, that is essentially dangerous, in a manner that tamed and neutralised it. However, we might suspect that pleasure and power have a more complex relationship than this. One way of dealing with this might be to raise the question of how and in what ways specific identities are constructed and addressed within the field of entertainment – specifically, as a popular form, we must be interested in the question of whether entertainment is a cultural form that encourages its audience to identify as working class, or whether it places its audiences in a class–neutral space.

We have seen, in Section One, how the music hall moved from being class-specific towards being acceptable across class divisions. In Traies discussion of the move towards appealing to the lower middle classes, as we have seen, the non-class specific nature of the music hall is of central importance.[1a] Entertainment offers a space to the aspirant working class and lower middle class where they are welcome and can belong to the community offered by the music hall, without having to identify as working class. Thus entertainment offers an important space within which they can be at one with the people again for brief periods without sacrificing their new hard-won class identity.

Since mass entertainment is reluctant to foster and demand an identification with working class identity, the critical project of seeking radical potential within entertainment

may be a mistake. Resistance to dominant power in the modern period has traditionally involved struggles whose tactics rely on concepts of unified and unifying identities. We might see an archetype for this mode of resistance in the proletarian fight for rights during the nineteenth century, which became increasingly plausible and effective as the working class itself began to stabilise and to form a precise and cohesive section of the population. Marxism provided a theoretical basis for this mode of resistance, by ascribing to the working class an intrinsically revolutionary function. This has been problematised by Foucault's reading of Marx in The Order of Things[1b]. According to Foucault, such a straightforward identification of the working class as (essentially) revolutionary is an indication that Marx is working within a discourse – that of economics – that carries with it certain unquestioned meanings. Within the episteme of economics, *value* is defined in terms of *labour*. The centrality of the idea of labour for this science whose aim was to explain the distribution of wealth meant that the labourers, in being given a specific economic function, were also given an identity that was taken for granted – those who had been the 'lower orders' of society became the 'working class'. Ascribing such a meaning to the most exploited social group was clearly in the interests of middle class dominance – defining this group as working class has the effect of hiding and naturalising the exploitation of labour that is taking place. Marx's significance as a theorist of resistance to this exploitation should be recognised in association with the fact that he works within this framework, and does not question the ideologically determined designation 'working class'. As Foucault says, "at the deepest level of Western knowledge, Marxism introduced no real discontinuity"[2].

Following from this, I would like to return to Raymond Williams' Keywords in order to look at the development of language around class, and some of the issues implicit in these terms. According to Williams, the significance of the development of "relatively fixed names for particular classes", which replaced the older language of 'ranks', 'stations' and 'orders' – a process taking place during the industrial revolution – is in its

correspondence with a new conception of society functioning as a system, a new awareness that social divisions are actually produced by society, and that "social position is made rather than merely inherited"[3]. In this context while 'lower' and 'lowest' class developed and were used as a categorisation toward the end of the eighteenth century, at the same time the 'useful' or 'productive' classes were being used to represent both the bourgeosie and the proletariat, with an implicit attack on the idleness of the aristocracy. Gaining political power, it became more important for the bourgeosie to distinguish themselves from the proletariat than to sustain a supposed solidarity with them against the upper classes, and it is in this context that the conception of productivity is as it were devolved solely onto the proletariat by naming them as the working classes (this took place between the 1810's and the 1830's). Williams maintains, then, that originally the 'working classes' was unqualifiedly a bourgeois description, a category not just produced in accordance with industrial capitalist practices, but represented (in language) in accordance with bourgeois interests. He continues: "the term 'working classes', originally assigned by others, was eventually taken over and used as proudly as 'middle classes' had been"[4].

As we have seen, for Foucault, Marx would simply represent the most resistant theoretical statement possible within the constraints of the hegemonic but nevertheless dispersed and multi–faceted modern discourse of economics, that was itself tied to middle class dominance (he argues that in fact the real epistemic break from the bourgeois economy of the Classical period occurs not with Marx but with Ricardo[5]). Clearly Williams' account of the emergence and development of the category of 'the working class' gives a rather more optimistic light to the process of this functioning as an identity within struggle than Foucault allows. It is as though the identification of what had been merely the lower ranks as the working class, despite being motivated by a middle class need to rationalise and justify its exploitation of and power over that group, also had an empowering capacity, that pointed political struggle in a particular direction based on a

belief in what were seen as natural rights.

Foucault's work is an important problematisation of Marxism's theoretical basis . In The Order of Things Foucault, however, does not really describe how it is that resistant or radical articulations of class identity (however mythic this is) function within specific struggles. E. P. Thompson's analysis, in The Making of the English Working Class[6], is of great interest here, as he explains class precisely as something that operates through a working system of perceived and lived identities, rather than being simply a supposedly objective bourgeois categorisation. He makes the point that the working class was "present at its own making", and that class is best not seen as a "structure" but as "something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships". Class only can become operative on the basis of developing struggles and conflicts – "we cannot have two distinct classes, each with an independent being, and then bring them *into* relationship with each other". Thompson continues:

> "class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs... Class–consciousness is the way in which [class] experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value–systems, ideas, and institutional forms"[7].

We can begin to see, then, the complexity of nineteenth century political struggle, and the ambiguity of the role popular cultural practices may have played within it. The historical constitution of the working class was associated with a more organised form of exploitation of labour, and with the establishment of a more docile and easily controllable workforce. But the main resistance to this exploitation essentially relies on precisely that establishment of a firm working class.

All of this leaves open the question of what role entertainment might have within the maintenance of working class identity. A key text in this area is Riachard Hoggart's

The Uses of Literacy – Aspects of working class life with special reference to publications and entertainment[8]. Hoggart was instrumental in the foundation of the higly influential Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies in 1964. Among the praise this book received, was that of Jean–Claude Passeron, who appreciated it for "drawing attention to the fact that the reception of a cultural message should not be disassociated from the social conditions in which it occurs"[9]. This remains an important consideration in textual analysis – in fact I will be stressing, in Chapter 2, how such a refusal to separate out artistic from other social practices is essential if we are understand what entertainment is doing. However, what I want to briefly look at here are two tendencies of the book, two assumptions that allow Hoggart to draw a picture of entertainment as having functions related to working class identity – whether these are reinforcement and unification or on the other hand fragmentation – but which I want to present, nevertheless, as reactionary in the extreme. I will refer to these as exoticisation and nostalgia.

To understand the first of these points it is important to understand the complexity of the ambiguous position from which Hoggart speaks and observes. Emphasising continually his own working class background, Hoggart nevertheless speaks from the position of the objective academic observer who analyses a subject he is not a part of, and from which his scientific gaze always keeps him detached. This distance is articulated through a set of stylistic devices: his constant usage of a generalising third person seems to refer to the working class as to a monolithic body; into these descriptions first person is sometimes allowed to break, but it functions as a sort of authentication device, proving that Hoggart holds a true knowledge of the working class through his experience of them, and seems to lead directly back into the descriptive third person that the author refuses to identify with; finally, frequent usage of dialect in inverted commas, highlights the language of the text as neutral and objective, as bearing the whole truth of the situations described, as opposed to the partial truths the working class themselves apparently only have access to.

> "Working–class people have had years of experience of waiting at labour–exchanges. at the panel doctor's, and at hospitals. They get something of their own back by always blaming the experts, with or without justification, if something goes wrong – 'Ah never ought to 'ave lost that child if that doctor 'ad known what 'e was doing.'"[10]
>
> "..the hymn which more than any other belongs to the working–classes, 'Abide with Me': it is sung at football matches and other large public occasions, and many a working–class mother asks only for that at her funeral. My mother did so, and my grandmother some years later; for both of them it had an enormous weight of suggestion.."[11]

This portrayal of a world of the other, of 'them' as opposed to 'us', implies that Hoggart positions himself as a privileged bearer of knowledge about what is seen as almost a foreign land with a strange set of customs. This is a book for the middle class, about the working class. Uses of Literacy at times reads rather like an explorer's narrative, and it is for this reason that I use the term exoticisation, with reference to Edward Said's analysis of Orientalist discourse[12]. According to Said, the Orientalist "makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West... What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact"[13]. Thus, an Orientalist text is characterised by its "exteriority to what it describes". Clearly, this is a similar textual strategy to Hoggart's. It is perhaps worth noting that, while in general Hoggart's contempt is hidden underneath an apparent admiration, at times his teeth show through – for example in his description of "a charwoman I knew in the late forties" as having "the spirits, and I say this with no intention of disparaging her, of a mongrel bitch"[14].

The second of these two tendencies is the ever–present nostalgia that inseparably accompanies Hoggart's idealised picture of working class integrity and unity. This

nostalgia play a central structuring role in Hoggart's argument. Thus, while part one ("An 'Older' Order") specifies working class characteristics such as the capacity to live life to the full, and the importance of the idea of home, and describes the richness of the working class oral tradition, part two ("Yielding Place to New") presents all of this as under threat from a trivial, "candy–floss" world.

Determining this picture of an inevitable decline taking place in the working class, who are seen as continually in danger of losing all the valuable characteristics they possess or have possessed, and as constantly subject to new forces that will destroy their lifestyle, is the image of an authentic folk culture being swamped by an empty, commercial, mass culture. This results in a sense of a lost mythic unity and communality: a strong and stable working class culture is celebrated at the expense of being presented as always already in the past. This, in fact, is what Uses of Literacy is largely famous for – Hoggart provides possibly the most celebrated articulation of an already conventional conception of a genuinely popular folk art tragically being destroyed by the traditionless frivolity of a non–class–specific mass art.

Within this model, entertainment is placed in an ambiguous cultural space. Popular cultural texts are judged with reference to these two categories – on the one hand, the authentic popular culture, and on the other the artificial and empty mass culture. Thus Hoggart praises Wilfred Pickles' radio show Have a Go for its retention of "the old values", claiming that it "provides a forum in which they [the northern working–class] can express and applaud the values they still admire". Hoggart goes on to define these:

> "'Straight–dealing', 'good neighbourliness', 'looking on the bright side', 'openness', 'lending a helping hand', 'not being stuck up or a getter–on', 'loyalty'; all these are a good deal more healthy than the commercial values – pride, ambition, outdoing your aquaintances, show for its own sake, conspicuous consumption – which working class people are consistently invited to adopt nowadays."[15]

This conception that certain forms of entertainment offer a sinister but irresistible

appeal is of great significance, especially as we consider (as I shall be doing later in the thesis) the role that Hoggart was to play in policy making within British broadcasting. For now, let us note that he sees certain cultural forms as representing an ever–present, overwhelming danger for society in general, but for the working class in particular.

> "The temptations..are towards a gratification of the self and towards what may be called a 'hedonistic–group–individualism'... It may well be... that working–class people are in some ways more open to the worst effects of the popularizer's assault than are some other groups... In many parts of life mass–production has brought good; culturally, the mass–produced bad makes it harder for the good to be recognized."[16]

The way in which Hoggart's text develops from a romanticised appraisal of a working class culture presented as in its death throes, to an attack on what it sees as an inevitably expanding commercial popular culture, again brings us back to Said's analysis. We have noted a corresponding textual strategy, and I would now like to suggest that Said's notion of the function of Orientalism has some relevance to The Uses of Literacy. Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient... European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."[17]. Similarly, Hoggart's text, finally, is working for the interests of the class wherein Hoggart emphatically places himself – the bourgeoisie. The constitution and reaffirmation of "mass entertainment" as trivial, worthless and in fact dangerous is really less to do with the nature of these forms, than to do with revalidating the importance of a kind of cultural mission, to uphold working class involvement with "serious" culture, and justifying intervention in and restriction of working class cultural practices. Hoggart's refusal to question the serious–trivial polarity becomes blatant at certain points in the book. Thus, toward the end of the book, after speaking about the increase in Sunday newspapers, he continues:

> "There have been concurrent increases in what I have been calling serious reading,

just as there have been increases in the audiences for some more serious pursuits generally... These details of more solid reading are encouraging, but need to be qualified. What proportions of the issues from public libraries are of worthless fiction? Most librarians would say, I think, that much of this fiction is of a very poor kind."[18]

It is as though the final aim of Hoggart's cultural theory is the defense of high culture – as high culture. Within this theory, working class cultural practices are placed in an inevitable teleology the course of which is wholly out of their own control. It is ironic that Hoggart does in fact so strongly emphasise the idea of tradition, since this history is conceptualised in quite a teleological manner. The working class during the first half of this century worked their way toward, as it were, their true and natural identity which they are now in danger of losing, under threat of the temptations that mass entertainment's frivolity represents.

Hoggart introduces the concept of "debunking" as a positive and valuable element of popular culture in the context of explaining the working class attitude toward authority, and defines it as "putting–a–finger–to–the–nose at authority by deflating it, by guying it"[19] . He proposes this attitude as a central characteristic of working class entertainment. In line with his fatalistic view of the trajectory of popular culture at his time of writing, Hoggart suggests that this debunking facility is in the process of being lost by the people. He explains that with increasing prosperity the working class loses, along with its singularity, its tendency and will to humourously bring authority down, and this change informs cultural forms which are thus emasculated. This modern working class..

> "ask 'them' [authority] for nothing and feel no particular resentment towards them. Such an attitude may be encouraged by the great quantity of entertainment offered today. These entertainments are of such a kind that they render their consumers less likely to make the ironically vigorous protest contained in debunking–art"[20].

This is a paradoxical argument – the working class can only remain strong by

remaining poor, and working class strength is equivalent to being stuck in an angry protest that effects no actual change. This is a profoundly bourgeois view of working class strength! Nevertheless, Hoggart has identified an important element of popular culture, which I wish to propose as central to entertainment. It is interesting to note, incidentally, Hoggart's own use of "entertainment" in this passage to suggest a modern, trivialised form of popular culture that has lost the true expression of this debunking tendency.

How does "debunking" actually work? Hoggart falls short of analysing this capacity as a textual strategy, and gives as an example the phenomenon of laughter at the cultured voices of cinema news–reels as an example[21]. There is a weakness in this attempt to explain popular taste on the basis of a working class response to legitimate culture, or at least on the basis of a discrepancy between the 'language' of the text and that of the audience. Once we accept that debunking is a conventional strategy within popular culture, however, we can identify it as one that can be adopted by, and within, texts themselves, as a structuring function. In this case, debunking becomes more complex, a stance taken by the text that relies on a complicity between itself and the audience, who are called upon, as an essential part of the reading of the text, to mock cultural pretension. It is as though the aim here is to break down the value of cultural knowledge, the devaluation of cultural capital.

In comparing mass culture unfavourably with his beloved authentic tradition of working class culture, Hoggart mourns the loss of this culture's capacity for expressing a working class voice, for fostering and maintaining a working class identity. However, the loss of this capacity to identify its spectators as working class, the imperative to broaden the range of its spectators, gives light entertainment a capacity that Hoggart misses.

Light entertainment identifies itself as an industry, as show business, and makes no claim to working class authenticity. In its quest for broad and diverse audiences mass entertainment loses its exclusive association with the working class, or with working class taste. It throws itself open to all of us as long as we are willing to put aside pretension for

a short period - thus, in a programme such as Blind Date, both identifiably posh and excessively common voices and attitudes are laughed at.

Because of this, the vulgarity characteristic of entertainment is similar to Hoggart's "debunking" but also very different. While debunking comes from an avowedly proletarian stance, laughing at cultural pretension exclusively from a position characterised by the absence of cultural facility, in the mass culture Hoggart so despises vulgarity diffuses this proletarian stance, allowing us all to mock pretension and to gain a degree of freedom from respectability and restraint. That is, in providing a space from which the spectator laughs at cultural aspiration and social hierarchy which is not exclusive to working class people, entertainment allows us to temporarily absent ourselves from class conflict and division. It aims to provide an experience we all enjoy together.

Before looking at this function in entertainment in more detail, however, let us turn to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, a Marxist sociologist who suggests a direct connection between cultural taste and the maintenance of class difference. Bourdieu's analysis of taste involves a reconceptualisation of class which in some ways is similar in approach to Hoggart's, since it is defined on the basis of the identities different lifestyles activate in the subject rather than in terms of structural features. Bourdieu however is much more useful for us, because of the very precise and explicit political aim of his work, in contrast to Hoggart's liberal stance which, as we have seen, masks a very clear anti-proletarian ideological bias.

BOURDIEU: A POLITICAL ATTACK ON ART

I have suggested that Bourdieu's approach to cultural analysis is, like Hoggart's, characterised by an insistence on examining cultural texts within their conditions of reception[1]. For Bourdieu, this refusal to remove texts from their social conditions represents a political dis–identification with the institutions of legitimate or high culture. Despite their complicity with the middle class (according to Bourdieu) these are in fact *aristocratic* in their aims. That is, these institutions operate within a system that maintains a social distinction on the basis of marking out those few with a supposedly natural good taste, a cultivated, 'cultured' élite. Following from this, opposition to these aims must attack this idea of taste, or "distinction", which is shown to be a fabrication. It is not that those who appreciate art tend to be middle class. Rather, engagement with high culture is a fundamental factor in achieving or maintaining social status, and the considerable amount of education needed to display 'good taste' in cultural matters is, for Bourdieu, a quite direct investment in social aspiration. While the new *petit bourgeoisie* can only ever receive this cultural education in an obvious and open way, through schooling which they are thus driven to perpetuate endlessly, the old, established *bourgeoisie*, having received this knowledge in the family through their cultured upbringing seem to have a naturally discerning eye, a natural knowledge of correct cultural responses and modes of behaviour. In Bourdieu's term, they display 'charisma'.

To demolish this idea of the apparently natural presence of good taste in the middle class – and associated with this, I would suggest, of vulgarity in the working class – taste itself must be relocated in a wider social arena. Thus Bourdieu approaches culture, like Hoggart, as a single aspect of lifestyle in general. Clearly this similarity is only skin–deep, since the logic behind this approach for Bourdieu is absolutely opposed to that of The Uses of Literacy. Distinction is concerned with the political determinations behind differences in living habits, differences which in Hoggart's account were explained simply in terms of the existence of two apparently independent traditions, with more or less

arbitrary characteristics. Bourdieu suggests the existence of an apparatus that in fact controls the apparently free choices people make in day to day living – this is the *habitus* – and insists that *bourgeois* and popular lifestyles function in opposition to one another, in a manner that is complicit with the maintenance of middle class dominance. Before looking at the struggles this implies, I want to explain a little more about this concept of the *habitus*.

Class is articulated through the *habitus*, which can be seen as a set of "transposable dispositions"[2], transposable, that is, to all areas of practice. A different set of these dispositions is characteristic of each class, whose typical lifestyle (as I've indicated) is thus determined directly by the *habitus*. What causes this system to function is the need of each agent to have access to "actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital"[3]: the adoption of a specific set of dispositions is determined by the actual profit they are likely to bring to the agent. Bourdieu in fact only deals with the first two of the three areas of capital he indicates in this quote – his positing of the existence of a cultural capital that functions, like economic capital, to elevate one's class status is the crucial new understanding of legitimate culture that Bourdieu furnishes us with. Essentially, the specific characteristics of each class are determined by firstly, the extent to which it possesses these two forms of capital, and in what composition, and secondly, their disposition toward their future prospects:

> "the different inherited asset structures, together with social trajectory, command the *habitus* and the systematic choices it produces in all areas of practice, of which the choices commonly regarded as aesthetic are one dimension"[4].

I want to make clear the advantages of this analysis. From the eighties, there has been an ongoing Marxist debate around class boundaries, whose underlying imperative has often been an assumed need to define an 'authentic' working class. In different ways, this has been a characteristic of much work that has been extremely influential for the ways in which the British academic left understand the nature of class difference. This would

include work by André Gorz (Farewell to the Working Class), Ellen Wood (The Retreat from Class), and a number of articles in the New Left Review[5]. In the light of Bourdieu's understanding of class, this work might be seen as largely irrelevant, and misguided. The motivation behind these efforts is the assumption that, in order for political change to take place, there must be one clearly identifiable and stable exploited group – 'the' working class – who unproblematically stand to benefit from this change. That is, the political imperative is for a cohesive working class – who are thus intrinsically revolutionary – to exclusively accept and take on this, their true identity. This whole area of confusion might be illuminated by reference once more to Williams' Keywords[6]. His discussion of the word 'class' highlights the ambiguity with which the word sometimes represents an (objective) economic category, but at others "a formation in which, for historical reasons, consciousness of [their] situation and the organisation to deal with it have developed."[7] In a sense, then, the debate I have mentioned can be seen as linguistically overdetermined. Bourdieu's own conception of class is not precisely the same as that of either of these two usages. It is a meaningful, objective identity that can exist outside of consciousness but which is nevertheless located precisely within the individual, not externally.

Bourdieu's conception of class involves a shift in the conceptualisation of class identity, which is problematised, and given a more fundamental significance. Class is not an objectively existing category that simply demands recognition – rather the production of identity is the mode through which class is articulated, and in fact produced in society. Bourdieu suggests a mode of political domination that does not take place solely through direct economic exploitation but occurs in a more mediated way, through the way people behave. To direct attention toward a final way of categorising class is a misplaced political objective, it is a vain, endless search – class identity, in effect, is a red herring, a myth that at root helps to maintain capitalism.

Bourdieu suggests a model of class as something articulated through a series of symbolic struggles, a continuous process in which specific class identities are established,

maintained, or broken down. In particular, his project is to explicate the functions of high culture, which he sees as a privileged site for these struggles, based on its perceived alliance with the middle classes. Rather than discussing *élitism* within cultural institutions, Bourdieu explains these functions on the basis of the taste for culture, the dispositions that coincide with specific cultural activities – and takes taste, therefore, to be the essential area whose analysis can clarify these functions. The analysis aims to reveal the symbolic use that is made of culture paradigmatically by the middle classes, who " are committed to the symbolic."[8]. Denaturalising cultural behaviour – most notably activities such as theatre–going, art exhibitions, concerts – Bourdieu explains it as not simply motivated politically, rather than by as it were innocent cultural preferences, but also as a fundamental element in the *bourgeois* maintenance of political dominance. The apparent passivity of the spectatorship that characterises this mode of cultural consumption, and these specific cultural forms, masks its true function. By demonstrating cultural ability, the dominant class demonstrate their superiority: cultural "distinction" – or "good taste" – is a means of articulating and upholding class distinction:

> "'Distinction' or better, 'class', the transfigured, misrecognizable, legitimate form of social class, only exists through the struggles for the exclusive appropriation of the distinctive signs which make 'natural distinction'."[9]

Bourdieu's notion of these symbolic battles is so important to his work that it's as well to be clear about his use of the term, so I will pause for a moment to explain this. The symbolic is often a central concept in structuralist and post–structuralist theory, within which it has taken on a diverse and sometimes incompatible set of meanings. Frequently usage is associated, explicitly or implicitly, with Lacan's explanation of the symbolic order, and I would like to clarify this.

Laplanche and Pontalis[10] usefully explain how Lacan's use of the symbolic differs from Freud's in that "it is the structure of the symbolic system which is the main consideration... while the links with what is being symbolised... are secondary". They

uncover two aims in Lacan's notion of the symbolic: "a. To compare the structure of the unconscious with that of language, and to apply to the former a method which has borne fruit in its application to linguistics./ b. To show how the human subject is inserted into a pre–established order which is itself symbolic in nature in Lacan's sense." Further, they refer to "two different but complementary paths" Lacan's use of the term takes. "First, he uses it to designate a structure whose discrete elements operate as signifiers (linguistic model) or, more generally, the order to which such structures belong (the symbolic order). Secondly, he uses it to refer to the law on which this order is based; thus when Lacan speaks of the symbolic father, or of the Name–of–the–Father, he has an agency in mind which cannot be reduced to whatever forms may be taken by the 'real' or the 'imaginary' father – an agency which promulgates the law."[11]. For Lacan, the Symbolic refers to the maintenance of "the law", which occurs by means of a process by which the individual gains a sense of identity through this production of an ideal figure, thus becoming a subject of society. This can only occur by renouncing the "Imaginary" and gaining access to the "Symbolic".

Bourdieu's "symbolic" shares some of the characteristics of Lacan's, but there are some important differences. It attempts to explain how people enter into a pre–existing order of power relations. However, it refers to practice rather than to the (inaccessible) subconscious, and it takes place in a social field rather than an individual psyche. That is, it refers directly to the preservation or alteration of existing class structures.

> "Struggles over the appropriation of economic or cultural goods are, simultaneously, symbolic struggles to appropriate distinctive signs in the form of classified, classifying goods or practices, or to conserve or subvert the principles of classification of these distinctive properties. As a consequence, the space of life styles... is itself only the balance sheet, at a given moment, of the symbolic struggles over the imposition of the legitimate life–style, which are most fully developed in the struggles for the monopoly of the emblems of 'class' "[12].

Such an explanation of subjection appears to leave more room for resistance than Lacan's, since the nature of Bourdieu's "symbolic" (unlike Lacan's) is arbitrary. However, Bourdieu's own analysis in fact conceptualises cultural domination as overwhelmingly hegemonic – in no way does he think of culture as a locus of resistance. Later in the thesis I shall consider whether such an assumption is justified. For the moment, however, and in order to clarify the symbolic importance of acts of choice in the field of culture, I will discuss in a little more detail Bourdieu's explanation of the group for whom perhaps the most is at stake in such choices – the *petit bourgeoisie*, whom he examines under the chapter heading "Cultural Goodwill"[13].

This "goodwill" is rather complex. It is partly based on a tendency toward a sacrifice of comfort and pleasure; "an almost insatiable thirst for rules of conduct which subjects the whole of life to rigorous discipline"[14]. Bourdieu explains this in terms of the faith in class mobility the *petit bourgeois* have:

> "Having succeeded in escaping from the proletariat, their past, and aspiring to enter the *bourgeoisie*, their future, in order to achieve the accumulation necessary for this rise they must somewhere find the resources to make up for the absence of capital. This additional force... can only be expressed negatively, as a limiting and restricting power.."[15]

Bourdieu claims that, as a result of this tendency, the social life of this class is transformed; the typical *petit bourgeois* "will break the ties, even the family ties, which hinder his individual ascension"[16]. Basing his analysis on empirical, statistical evidence, Bourdieu establishes that the *petit bourgeoisie* have a low fertility rate and a live in a typically small family unit, and explains this in terms of a set of hypothesised "fertility strategies", which allow both cultural and financial accumulation to take place at the expense of limiting the expenditure of time and money. Thus, in attempting to engage with a properly *bourgeois* set of codes and values, the *petit bourgeois* is forced into "renouncing the popular conception of family relations and the functions of the domestic

unit, abandoning not only the satisfactions of the extended family and a whole traditional mode of sociability, with its exchanges, its festivities, its conflicts, but also the guarantees which it offers... in a world haunted by domestic instability and social and economic insecurity."[171]

In this representation, the *petit bourgeoisie* emerge as the most insecure social group, because social and family ties, in being broken, no longer offer this protective function, but neither do they serve any aspirational function – "they are not yet connections". Thus they exist in a state of total class anxiety:

> "Their concern for appearance... is also a source of their pretension, a permanent disposition towards the bluff or usurpation of social identity which consists in anticipating 'being' by 'seeming', appropriating the appearances so as to have the reality... Torn by all the contradictions between an objectively dominated condition and would–be participation in the dominant values, the *petit bourgeois* is haunted by the appearance he offers to others and the judgement they make of it"[18].

This sociological, theoretical explanation of the *petit bourgeois* lifestyle, then, explains also their cultural behaviour. Bourdieu claims that the *petit bourgeois* approach to culture is determined by this same aspirational trajectory, which is always foiled by their lack of confidence and their inadequate knowledge of cultural codes. The immediate pleasure Bourdieu imputes to working class festivity is sacrificed for the sake of the future profits expected from a cultivated way of living, and the making of a cultural investment. Typically less thoroughly educated than the *bourgeoisie*, the *petit bourgeois* thus lack cultural capital, which they generally have to acquire by becoming "autodidacts". This is necessary for them because of the gap between their "recognition" and their "knowledge" – between their (absence of) familiarity with culture, and their awareness that it is the field within which social aspirations may be articulated. The unending struggle for education this implies disallows them from participating in legitimate culture, where "the important thing is to know without ever having learnt"[19]. Their incomplete cultural knowledge

means that the *petit bourgeois* is caught up in a series of "false recognitions" – they "take light opera for 'serious music' "[20], for example. This is reinforced by the reverence with which they treat whatever is seen as cultivated. Ironically, it is this "goodwill", this lack of confidence and sense of unworthiness, that gives them away.

> "What makes middle–brow culture is the middle–class relation to culture... What makes the *petit–bourgeois* relation to culture and its capacity to make 'middle–brow' whatever it touches, just as the legitimate gaze 'saves' whatever it lights upon, is not its 'nature' but the very position of the *petit bourgeois* in social space, the social nature of the *petit bourgeois*"[21].

Bourdieu describes "middle–brow" culture as an attempt to combine "two normally exclusive characteristics, immediate accessibility and the outward signs of cultural legitimacy."[22]. As a result of misrecognition the *petit bourgeois* "invests its good intentions in the minor forms of the legitimate cultural goods and practices"[23]. They have "a taste for 'educational' or 'instructive' entertainments" that, like their "choice of 'well–bred' friends" testifies to "cultural docility"[24]. Thus the *petit bourgeois*, while they have little access to the "cultural game", nevertheless uphold it, by affirming the exclusiveness of legitimate culture. But they define themselves against the proletariat and what is identifiable as proletarian taste: "Middle brow culture is resolutely against vulgarity"[25]. Sited in the middle, "equidistant from the two extreme poles of the field of the social classes... the *petit bourgeois* are constantly faced with ethical, aesthetic or political dilemmas forcing them to bring the most ordinary operations of existence to the level of conscious and strategic choice"[26]. And although it determines their behaviour, they are ill–equipped to deal with this strategic choice:

> "Uncertain of their classifications, divided between the tastes they incline to and the tastes they aspire to, the *petit bourgeois* are condemned to disparate choices... In radio programmes, they combine a taste for light music with an interest in cultural programmes, two classes of goods which, at two ends of the social space, are

mutually exclusive.."[27]

Thus, the *petit bourgeoisie* make a deliberate choice to sacrifice immediate pleasures for the sake of the long–term profits they expect to gain from this choice. They hope to change their class identity, to gain a symbolic status, by refusing to identify with the culture they understand and enjoy (vulgar, popular culture), and instead attempting to adopt a different set of values and conventions. This is not just a matter of learning about art, but also determines a whole mode of behaviour – their appearance, eating habits, ways of speaking and so on.

Bourdieu explains the production of a science of aesthetics, from Kant, as necessary in order to set up culture as a separate site, one that is seen as disinterested and unrelated to economic considerations, within which a system of symbolic, and less easily opposed, power functioned. Thus, Bourdieu's theory gives a socio–political theoretical foundation to the process of cultural and linguistic change Raymond Williams describes. Williams, in fact, celebrated Distinction in an article written with Nicholas Garnham for Media, Culture and Society[28]. They present his work as a critique of on the one hand subjectivism – which in this context refers to existential and phenomenological theory, and on the other objectivism – that is, structuralism and functionalism. By looking at individual agents, and placing reality at the level of experience, Sartre (representing the first of these two theoretical outlooks) neglects the external factors that determine human behaviour. Rejecting this approach, Althusser and Levi–Strauss (representing the latter) are criticised on the basis that they "fetishize the structures, making the agents mere performers of preordained scores"[29]. The importance Bourdieu places on acts of choice, which as we have seen are taken in accordance with a framework of expectations that depends upon one's envisaged future trajectory, is seen to resolve this opposition – Bourdieu explains "the relationship between on the one hand the observed regularities of social action, the structure, and on the other the experiential reality of free, purposeful, reasoning human actors"[30].

We have seen that, for Bourdieu, the discourse of aesthetics has a clear function. Put simply, its purpose is to allow art to become increasingly complex and reflexive, in order that it should function with increasing effectivity as a marker of cultural distinction. With an ever–expanding frame of reference needed in order to formulate an appropriate response to any given work of art, the distance between those philistines (most typically the *petit bourgeoisie*) who are caught by their cultural inability in a never–ending series of mistakes, and those who display cultural confidence and with it their possession of good taste, becomes ever clearer. In fact, then, Bourdieu provides a political rationale behind the representation of art as being difficult, demanding – a representation that I suggest has as its correlary that entertainment be understood to be easy and natural. This opposition appears in a most dramatic way in the context of the *petit bourgeois* social position, for whom it takes the form of a political choice, a deliberate placing of allegiance.

In summary, then, Bourdieu proposes an economy of practices, with a definite but rather complex and mediated relation to the actual economy, whose currency is "cultural capital" (which transfers most directly into economic capital through the education system and its relation to career prospects), and which is driven by a drive for social aspiration. In order for this economy to operate then, the establishment and maintenance of a set of oppositions is necessary[31] – for example between the banal and the great, between the universally popular and that which is appreciated only by a few, between that which is seen to require little from the consumer (eg. 'easy listening') and that which is seen to require an expertise for its appreciation. It will be seen I hope that the opposition between Art and entertainment that I have already discussed in relation to its development in the nineteenth century, can be mapped onto this. Thus, in order for distinction, or taste, to become a recognisable characteristic in people that operates as a sign to indicate their true class nature, their true cultural status, the maintenance of this other set of distinctions in the field of culture is required.

TOWARD A THEORY OF VULGARITY

Bourdieu's central project is a critique, an explanation of legitimate culture's complicity with bourgeois political power. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that he pays little attention to the possibility of other cultural functions. This rigidity is quite clear in the dismissive scepticism he expresses in a series of brief references to "counter–culture" of one kind or another.[1] His use of this widely discredited concept enables him to dismiss a wide range of cultural practice without giving it any serious consideration, far less the thorough examination he gives to "legitimate culture".

On the one hand, this scepticism seems very important. If the politics of culture stem from its functioning as an institution, rather than from the apparent politics of any particular practice within this institution, then apparently avant–garde practices – however radical in content – may still serve to maintain the institution, and uphold its credibility. However, this doesn't really account for vulgarity. We have seen how Bourdieu sees *petit–bourgeois* cultural behaviour as being systematically determined by an aspirational motive, based on an implicit belief in class mobility, an optimism located always in the future. His model of this specific area of cultural practice thus explains its complicity with bourgeois power. On the other hand, the other choice, as it were, the refusal to attempt to engage in the cultural game, is not really given the same consideration. In fact, he explains popular culture negatively. High culture exists in order to uphold a process of cultural aspiration: works of art are appropriated symbolically, rather than materially, and thus the subject – who by playing this game is identified as the bearer of taste – builds up his/her cultural capital. For this system to operate it is not necessary for which cultural texts are seen as high and which are seen as low culture to remain stable, as long as the categories remain distinct. At any given point it should be possible to define authentically low culture as that whose consumption serves no aspirational purpose.

However, having identified this function in legitimate culture, Bourdieu refuses to consider the possibility of a different set of functions in popular culture. Thus, vulgarity

cannot be seen as having any motivation of its own, or as having any cultural strategy behind it – it simply arises from cultural inability, from ignorance of legitimate cultural codes. An article by John Frow points out the obvious inadequacy of this model – "The concept of 'deprivation' is itself unsatisfactory because it accepts as given the norms of high culture. Cultural disadvantage is, in fact, operative only *on the grounds of high culture*"[2].

Bourdieu's concept of aesthetic negation – "as soon as art becomes self–conscious... it is defined by a negation, a refusal, a renunciation, which is the very basis of the refinement in which a distance is marked from the simple pleasure of the senses and the superficial seductions of gold and ornaments that ensnare the vulgar taste of the Philistines"[3] – by which art becomes formal rather than functional, is premised upon a distance from necessity. To mark this, art refuses to regard itself as pleasurable – it must be seen as difficult and demanding, rather than easy or relaxing. But because the working class do not possess this privileged distance from necessity, form is subordinated to function, and therefore popular art can have no autonomous aesthetic.

This is very problematic. Against the closely examined characteristics of art, whose strategic nature Bourdieu identifies, all the features of popular culture are, given that they are not part of any aesthetic, naturalised in quite a naïve way: "everything takes place as if the 'popular aesthetic' were based on the affirmation of continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function, or, one might say, on a refusal of the refusal which is the starting point of the high aesthetic, ie. the clear–cut separation of ordinary dispositions from the specifically aesthetic disposition."[4] I find this quite a surprising assumption, and it is very questionable how easily Bourdieu could maintain it if he granted popular culture the attention he does to art. Because he doesn't, Frow argues, the dominant values then seem "to become something absolute, and the working class to be inevitably and inexorably entrapped within the cultural limits imposed on it"[5].

By refusing to accept the possibility of motives other than cultural aspiration for cultural activities, and refusing any idea that class identities are the product of a negotiation between classes, rather than simply imposed on the working class, it seems he can only really account for the disadvantaged working class response to legitimate culture, and offers no real insight into the nature of participation in popular culture at all, which is dealt with as though it were simply a form of legitimate culture that was infinitesimally low in cultural capital.

> "The experiences which the culturally most deprived may have of works of legitimate culture (or even of many of the prefabricated entertainments offered by 'show business') is only one form of a more fundamental and more ordinary experience, that of the division between practical, partial, tacit know–how and theoretical, systematic, explicit knowledge... between the 'intellectual' or the 'creator' (who gives his own name to an 'original', 'personal' work and so claims ownership) and the 'manual' worker (the mere servant of an intention greater than himself, an executant dispossessed of the idea of his own practice"[6]

This conception of the opposition between high and low culture is reminiscent of the one posited by many structuralist and post–structuralist theorists between science and "common sense" or "ideology" (Althusser), "the savage mind" (Levi–Strauss), or "narrative knowledge" (Lyotard)[7]. The latter's formulation (in The Postmodern Condition) is particularly useful: in opposition to science – which, composed of denotative statements, refers to the application of a criterion of truth – "narrative knowledge" includes notions of "know–how" which define a large number of competences that are part of everyday life. Furthermore, this form of knowledge is based on a consensus at a given community (an agreement on what is beautiful or worthwhile, and on how to behave, to celebrate etc.) which forms, defines and protects its identity in relation to other communities. In a way "entertainment" operates in the same sphere and in a similar fashion. On the other hand, high art (Bourdieu's "legitimate culture"), very much like

Lyotard's "science", relies for the legitimation of its social function on the one hand on a consensus of experts (art historians, critics, theorists, educators) and on the other on a "narrative" (similar to the "grand narrative of emancipation" posited by Lyotard *vis–a–vis* science) of the "up–lifting" and eventually "liberating" effect it has on "people". It is only art, rather than entertainment, that needs to legitimate itself in this way.

Michel Pecheux's work on discourse might suggest a way to explain Bourdieu's inability to theorise popular culture[8]. Rather than a disidentification, as I stated earlier, we could see Bourdieu's argument as effecting a counter–identification with legitimate culture, a position typical for a critique. That is, while attacking and dismantling the strategies proper to culture, Bourdieu in fact stays within its frame of reference, is caught within its own language. Explaining counter–identification, McDonnel writes "Complicity arises where, through lack of a positive starting point, either a practice is driven to make use of prevailing values, or a critique becomes the basis.. for a new theory"[9]. On the other hand – "Disidentification... comes from another position, one existing antagonistically, with the effect that the identity and identifications set up in dominant ideology, though never escaped entirely, are transformed and displaced."[10]. Positions of disidentification cannot be found in low culture by an observer caught in a counter–identification with high culture.

In Bourdieu's model of class differentiation, then, subjection is determined solely by the ruling class. In implicitly denying that class subjection is the result of a <u>negotiation</u> between the ruling and the ruled classes, he cannot account for the acceptance by the proletariat of subjection, which then remains unexplained. Thus, the exploitation of the working class is completely taken for granted. This is a rather sorry state for a Marxist sociologist to be in.

We have seen that it is essential for legitimate culture to present itself as in some way more demanding of cultural knowledge and an educated reading by the consumer than popular culture, in order for it to "classify the classifier". It might be that the refusal

by popular culture to acknowledge such an educated reading for itself is not simply an absence, but part of an autonomous set of strategies. As Frow says, Bourdieu is "much more ambivalent how choices are made within the 'popular' aesthetic"[11], and it would be a worthwhile extension of his work to account for tastes within popular culture as well as legitimate culture.

If legitimate culture works to uphold social distinction it seems that low culture is more ambiguous politically. Entertainment forms that can be seen as relatively class–specific – bingo or dog–racing could be seen as clear examples, though textual forms such as musicals or television light entertainment are considerably less straightforward – might be seen as marking out their spectators as working class. But on the other hand, the ways in which entertainment forms portray and define themselves tends to break this down. Thus entertainment tends to represent itself as universally popular, and tends to naturalise and glide over the act of cultural choice that has been made by the spectator (the very act that is highlighted by legitimate culture).

As I've explained, Bourdieu explains is primarily interested in the function of legitimate culture. This function is essentially tied to the affirmation of identity – one engages oneself in the game of culture in order to initiate and continue a never ending process through which one defines one's own respectability, or mastery, or refinement – in the end, one's superiority and distinction. This cannot be said of engagement in those cultural forms which are not seen or presented as demanding or as requiring taste for their consumption however, and presumably it is at this point that a line between high and low culture, art and entertainment, can be sketched.

Because of the way it presents itself, it's very easy to explain entertainment simply in terms of an absence, "the negation of a negation" – this latter negation being the displacement from unmediated to mediated pleasures that legitimate culture supposedly involves. But already this difference seems to point to a possible explanation of a distinct function of low cultural forms; the refusal to engage in the game of aspiration surely might

be seen to offer a capacity for moments of defiance. The problem is that Bourdieu's reluctance to grant any features unique to "the popular taste", and occasional romanticisation of that taste, eventually leaves us simply with a banal 'lowest common denominator' explanation of the pleasures involved. And this is of course to simply fall blindly into the conceptual framework that legitimate culture has established in order that its own function may operate: that is, legitimate culture is seen to require cultivated tastes; the taste for entertainment is seen as natural, the engagement in it as requiring no skill or specific knowledges. So if on the one hand Bourdieu seems to offer a radical direction in which cultural studies might go, and a warning against too easily detecting apparent moments of resistance without being aware of the underlying function of upholding distinction such moments are serving, on the other he himself ignores some of the most basic insights of cultural theory, and because of this parts of his analysis seem naïve and irrelevant. Whether we finally explain entertainment as potentially radical, or simply as functioning within a hegemonic power system to maintain docility, or whether we believe it is more complex, we must account for engagement within low culture, without taking access to this facile 'natural taste' explanation. That is, we must provide the sort of politics of low taste, of vulgarity, that Bourdieu only provides for high taste and respectability.

In his first discussion of what he refers to as "the popular 'aesthetic' " – the inverted commas warning against the danger of attributing "the coherence of a systematic aesthetic to the objectively aesthetic commitments of ordinary people"[12] – the extent to which Bourdieu is unwilling to enter into any theorisation of popular taste becomes clear. It might be that taking the aesthetic disposition of the populace as a kind of zero degree allows the arbitrary nature of the legitimate aesthetic disposition to be highlighted. Nevertheless, passages such as the following seem striking. Bourdieu has been discussing the formal refinement, the "refusal to communicate" that the working class finds off-putting in legitimate culture. He continues:

"Conversely, popular entertainment secures the spectator's participation in the show and collective participation in the festivity which it occasions. If circus and melodrama... are more 'popular' than entertainments like dancing or theatre, this is not merely because, being less formalized... and less euphemized, they offer more direct, more immediate satisfactions. It is also because, through the collective festivity they give rise to and the array of spectacular delights they offer... they satisfy the taste for and sense of revelry, the plain speaking and hearty laughter which liberate by setting the social world head over heels, overturning conventions and proprieties."[13]

By refusing to pursue any further the idea of the "taste for revelry", which is blithely passed over without question or investigation, the impression left is that this is an innate taste. Festivity is taken to be an unformalised and direct expression of ahistorical and primal pleasures – despite the obvious fact that the cultural forms he refers to (the circus, melodrama) deploy deeply conventional, encoded structures developed within a specific cultural tradition. In fact, the imbalance in Bourdieu's work is quite clear; the deconstruction of innate breeding takes place at the expense of retaining a conception of 'innate' popular tastes.

Let us return, then, to the concept of vulgarity as a strategy within entertainment texts. What do we gain from engagement in texts characterised by an absence of cultural capital?

In order to explore this further, I shall look quite closely at a short sequence from a George Formby film, in order to demonstrate the position that appears to be offered to us. Formby is an important figure in Britain in relation to the question of the capacity of entertainment to appeal to a wide spectrum, given his huge success during the thirties and forties. This appeal is certainly not achieved through avoiding class conflict. His own persona is essentially northern working class, and his plots continually express a mild form of proletarian hostility to middle class figures. As Peter Stead has argued, his films

constantly approach the political:

> "but his plots never really amounted to a serious statement, and the challenge to authority tended to come in the attitudes shown to and remarks made about the rich, and perhaps above all from the sheer natural cheekiness of the star"[13a]

The sequence I am looking at comes from a film made immediately prior to the war - I See Ice [14] - and was made at a point when Formby's success as an entertainer in Britain was pre-eminent.

This film casts Formby as an amateur photographer, and its plot is centred around his attempts to secure a journalistic job. Formby's gormless working class persona is a given factor, and his ambition is clearly marked as the desire to 'better himself', and to enter a middle class world. The contrast between what he wants to be and what he is, is made more clear by his position as a Northerner awkwardly placed in London, a situation common in George Formby texts – songs as well as films. Another central but unstated device through which this aspirational ambition is structured in the film is the class difference between Formby and his girl – again, this is typical in Formby's films. In I See Ice, Judy – a dancer – has a polite and genteel voice whose received pronunciation clearly marks her difference from Formby throughout the film. In the sequence I analyse here, her relative familiarity with 'society' means that the ignorant, vulgar Formby alone represents the proletarian's discomfort with high culture.

In this sequence, George and Judy have been invited to a smart restaurant – the Lotus – by Mr Galloway, a newspaper owner who mistakenly thinks Formby is blackmailing him with a compromising photograph. Galloway has sent two 'reporters' (in fact they're more like heavies) to get the photograph from Formby. Formby, excited and proud that he can take Judy to such a smart place, has hired a suit for the occasion, unaware that it is in fact a waiter's uniform. This is the first of a series of gaffes through which Formby's 'out of place'–ness is emphasised in this sequence.

As he enters the Lotus, dressed as a waiter, Judy exclaims "George, I hardly

recognised you", to which he responds, laughing, "I don't know myself either". As they walk through the luxurious and classy foyer, Formby awkwardly but amicably returns the formal, welcoming bows of the doormen, to their surprise. Having been given a table, Formby's lack of understanding continues to be the comic thrust of the scene as he orders the meal. "Salmon?", "Well, tell him to open a fresh tin"; and for dessert he demands Roly–Poly Pudding, and is amazed that the posh French waiter has never heard of it – "If me mother was here she'd show you".

At this point the comedy of the scene is given some respite, as it is broken into by a musical sequence. "Pierre and Yvette" are introduced, ballroom dancers. Their light, novelty ballet act is intercut with George and Judy spectating. Formby's comic 'misrecognition' of legitimate culture is temporarily suspended at this point – the function of this musical number is to propel the romantic narrative strand of the film. Thus Formby, sitting at the table explains to Judy how he wishes he could dance like that, leading to the song Noughts and Crosses. As Formby sings, he and Judy in fact play a game, George drawing hearts instead of noughts. Even here there seems to be a demonstration of Formby's cultural misplacement, since they scrawl the game on the tablecloth, as though they were in a working class cafe with paper on the tables (although, given the thrust of the film being romantic rather than comic at this point, this joke is not highlighted).

However, this is only a temporary suspension, since the short sequence following the song (after a brief ellipsis cutting to the newspaper office) reintroduces the misplacing of Formby in a cultured setting as comedic material, which in fact provides a climax to this scene. The processes at work in this sequence are quite complex, and deserve a shot–by–shot analysis.

> 1: Laughing group at the table, where Galloway's 'reporters' have joined Judy and George, who is now quite drunk. Judy reprimands him: "George, you mustn't have any more", "Well, I like it", "Yes I know, but you're not used to it", "Well, now's me

chance to learn". One of the reporters asks Judy to dance, and George insists that they do. The camera closes in on George and the remaining reporter, who begins to do vanishing tricks with a cork, which he makes reappear in George's pockets in order to search him, making George laugh more than ever – "ah, you're tickling me". George is thoroughly impressed by the conjuring – "eeh, it's champion", and has more champagne plied on him.
2: Cut to the dancing couple, from the reporter's point–of–view. Look exchanged between the two reporters.
3: Two–shot at the table again. Camera pulls back as Judy and reporter return. Formby hiccups. Judy – "I *told* you not to have any more". Formby hiccups again, this time emphasised by circus–type drum–beat on soundtrack.
4: Reaction shot of astonishment and shock of respectable old man at another table.
5: Group shot, Formby's table. Judy – "Are you alright?". Formby, embarrassed and awkward, holds his stomach and blows out his cheeks, trying to stop his hiccups.
6: Cut to announcer in front of orchestra. "And now, ladies and gentlemen – by special request, Signor Moretti will sing the romance from Tannhauser". Camera pans to entrance as the confidentally smiling Moretti appears, to applause. He is a stereotyped Italian opera singer, with a large waxed moustache, and a proud bearing. He is seen in almost full figure.
7: Cut back to group shot of table, looking right off–screen toward Moretti and applauding.
8: Moretti, in medium–long shot, makes a flamboyant signal toward his accompanist, and luxuriously begins his song, expansively holding his arms out before him. Facing us, his gaze encompasses the field to the left and right of the camera.
9: Group shot, Formby looking uncertain and uncomfortable, fiddling with his bow tie.
10: Moretti continues singing.
11: Formby's table: at end of second line of song, he hiccups loudly.
12: Immediate cut back to Moretti who, while still singing, turns sharply round to the left (we take it, toward Formby), looking stung and outraged.
13: Two–shot, George and Judy. At end of third line, another hiccup.
14: Moretti (still singing), in closer shot (from waist up), looks furious.
15: Two–shot: Judy anxiously whispers – "Hold your breath and count to ten".
16: Cut in to close–up of Formby's face as he does this.
17: Cut back to two shot.
18: Moretti, now in close–up, with a less angry expression, the direction of his gaze less certain.
19: Two shot. Now cured, Formby is delighted, and makes gestures toward Moretti – pointing to his chest and making a 'thumbs–up' sign.
20: As if responding to this, Moretti's radiant smile (in close–up) has returned, though he now clearly isn't looking in Formby's direction.
21: Two shot, Formby now relaxed and relieved – but suddenly another violent hiccup.

22: Immediate cut back to insulted Moretti: now in medium close–up he turns to face Formby. From this point the pace of the editing accelerates.
23: Two shot, Formby completely flustered – patting his chest desperately, holding it in. Another hiccup.
24: Cut back to Moretti. He turns left again, and advances aggressively toward camera looking down at Formby.
25: Two–shot, Formby increasingly confused. He hiccups again, causing his shirt front to roll up and slap his face.
26: Moretti, very close, continues to bear down upon the camera.
27: Close–up of Formby, looking up, terrified.
28: Cut back to group shot of table. George leaps up to escape. Judy – "Where are you going?"; George, running off – "I'm.."; reporters, as they rise – "Don't worry, we'll look after him". Camera pans as George dashes across the room, passing Moretti. Mocking laughter of the clientele begins to drown out the close of Moretti's song. A final hiccup as George gets through the door.

Everything about this sequence characterises Formby as the aspirant *petit–bourgeois* defined by Bourdieu – incapable of understanding middle class proprieties, at first he does not even recognise the mistakes he makes. Finally his spectatorial inadequacy reveals his ignorance, and – as though symbolising the capacity of art to identify and reject the vulgar – he is expelled, but through his own volition, from the cultural arena.

Formby's presence is disruptive in the restaurant – to a degree he even represents a threat. This threat might be broken down into two components. Firstly, he confuses the social hierarchy through a breakdown of identity. His waiter's costume and his refusal to accept the bows of the waiters' breaks down the relationship between server and served, echoing another confusion – that between spectator and performer. If rank isn't recognised, everyone is brought down to the same level. Secondly, Formby's vulgarity is manifest in his irrepressible body functions – it is as though the respectable surroundings cannot tolerate this lack of decorum. Let us explore these two elements of the sequence.

The most offensive and sacrilegious aspect of Formby's behaviour, and the climax to his series of inabilities in this cultured setting, is his refusal to conform to the conventions of bourgeois spectatorship, which he seems to involuntarily replace with those of the music hall. Thus, the distance between performer and audience crucial to bourgeois performance is broken down, as Moretti is forced to acknowledge Formby's presence. Furthermore, as Formby directs gestures toward Moretti, the editing deliberately reaffirms an interaction between the two agents. Thus, while it is left ambiguous for the sake of realism, it appears that Moretti's smile answers Formby's thumbs–up. It is as though the film is complicit in this breakdown.

Clearly, the comedy of this sequence relies on the way in which the two–and–fro editing sets the situation up as a confrontation. What is striking in this confrontation, though, is the investment placed in the bodies of the two agents. In fact, it is structured around an opposition between two ways of holding the body. Thus, while Moretti is supremely assured and confident, Formby is awkward and incapable. The control Moretti has over his whole body is contrasted to Formby's incontinence.

However, it is rather ambiguous, in the end, who the joke is on here. Apparently, Formby presents a ludicrous figure, but in fact, in contrast to his down–to–earth–ness, Moretti's assurance becomes laughably pretentious. Within the context of the film, in fact, this musical sequence stands out against the others, in which Formby, singing, gains a rapport with the audience. Here, Moretti, in singing, alienates himself from the (cinema) audience – he is a comic figure. Though Formby's characterisation – within the film – appears to be illustrative of Bourdieu's model of culture, representing a picture of *petit bourgeois* discomfort with truly bourgeois modes of behaviour (in eating out, and in

spectatorship), the film itself directs the joke onto the opera singer.

So what position is offered to us – the spectator – during this sequence? We are given Formby as a comic figure, and we do laugh at his inability to properly fit in with the norms of respectability. Yet he remains a sympathetic figure, and it would appear that this would still be so whether we regard Formby from a position of equality, or one of superiority. That is, whether we ourselves share Formby's cultural insecurity, and are unfamiliar with this sort of smart and respectable setting and the behaviour required of us in such a setting, or whether we are completely at ease in such surroundings, the film allows us to both sympathise with Formby's plight while finding it humorous. On the other hand, when we laugh at Moretti's cultivation we are much more clearly put in the position of the uncultured working class. For middle class members of the audience, it is as though there is a temporary suspension of class status, and of social aspiration, while we laugh at the pretension of class difference.

In fact, a range of positions are open to us, and the film thus successfully negotiates a space that contrives to be entertaining to people from a range of backgrounds, although it is clear that this has some limitations. Thus, when Mass Observation looked at the audience response to entertainment films in November 1939, at the beginning of the War, it found that Formby was "loved in Bolton and hated in Surrey".[15] Nevertheless, according to the Motion Picture Herald, Formby was Britain's top male box office attraction from 1937 to 1943.[16]

It appears as this is possible largely because Formby remains so humble and harmless, in no way threatening a relationship of domination between the middle and working classes. This is central to Formby's persona, and I think we can relate this to his

success. Formby became increasingly popular among all classes during the late thirties, and during the war was again and again used as a symbol of the unity of the country, being awarded an OBE in 1946[17]. This is so despite the degree to which contemporary British critics ignored his films, regarding them with something of a sense of national shame as cheap and unprofessional in contrast to Hollywood comedy.[17a] Why was this? One way of addressing this question might be to compare Formby's persona to that of other comics of the time, and at this point I would like to use a little space to indicate some of the similarities and differences between George Formby and some of the other significant figures in British entertainment during the 1930s and 1940s.

Gracie Fields came from very much the same Northern working class music hall tradition as Formby, and like him took this tradition to the cinema. However, she did not achieve the same degree of popularity among the population as a whole as Formby did, her work remaining much more identifiably working class entertainment. It is notable that her films generally place her in her own environment, the North, whereas Formby is generally taken to a foreign environment, the South. Furthermore, she is frequently given a narrative role that Formby never takes – that of rallying the community to overcome some obstacle.

Thus, in Sing As We Go (directed by Basil Dean, Ealing, 1934), Fields plays a worker at Grey Beck Mill in Rochdale, which closes, leaving Fields and the other workers unemployed. She is in love with the boss's son, which places her in a position both of proximity to and opposition with the boss, from which position she represents the workers' case to him. The tensions implicit in this narrative are resolved at the end of the film, where she loses the boss's son to her friend, but the is given the position of welfare officer

at the re–opened mill. Similarly, the plot of Look Up and Laugh (also directed by Basil Dean, Ealing, 1935) is based around a market being threatened with closure, due to competition from a chain store. Fields, playing the daughter of one of the stall holders, pulls the community together, successfully organising a strategy for keeping the market open.

Neither of these films could be described as especially radical, inasmuch as the relationship between capital and labour, and the subservient role of the working class within industrial capitalism, remains fundamentally unquestioned, and is completely taken for granted. Nevertheless, in these films, Gracie Fields clearly carries much more of a sense of working class solidarity and strength than George Formby does. In contrast to Fields, Formby provides a remarkably innocuous representation of the working class. Frank Randle's comedy provides another interesting contrast with that of Formby's, particularly as there was a real-life rivalry between the two of them, which has been well documented by C.P. Lee. In Lee's analysis, Randle's comedy was "essentially northern" whereas he characterises Formby as a "crossover artist", because of his appeal to the south and the middle classes.[17b] Interestingly, although Lee does not point this out, this aspect of Formby was inherited from his father, George Formby Senior, who was a highly successful music hall turn a generation previously, who similarly achieved success in London through playing the comical role of a gormless Northerner lost in the big city, in songs such as "Did you see the crowds at Piccadilly".

There may be a weakness in holding up Randle as a model of northern integrity in contrast to Formby, however, as Randle himself certainly sought similar general success to Formby. However, Lee's analysis of Randle's comedy, as representing northern working

class anger and bitterness, and using a mode of address that attacks others, rather than making fun of himself, demonstrates clearly a style of comedy that resists a descent into light entertainment. In contrast to Randle, Lee sees Formby as a reactionary figure:

> "Formby's appeal lay in his mawkish sentimentality and local lad charm. Essentially he was 'safe'."[17c]

Formby has a different set of characteristics in common with another popular contemporary comic and singer, Max Miller. This comparison is quite familiar - for example Nuttall and Carmichael look at Formby and Miller in relation to their concept of an opposition between Northern humour that celebrates community and Southern 'wit'. However, there is an interesting comparison to be made between them on the basis of the image of manhood they project. Both used a form of comedy that relied heavily on sexual innuendo – this is most notable in their songs, and both Formby and Miller's songs were (and are) similarly regarded as risqué and naughty. However, their personas suggest very different constructions of masculinity. While Formby typically portrays a harmless and ineffectual voyeur, characterised by a lack of sexual knowledge and ability, Miller portrays himself as sexually capable, and rapacious. As Nuttall and Carmichael put it:

> "Rather than couch his vulgarity in giggles of coy domestic innuendo, he hammered it home, fast and filthy"[18]

The persona that Miller established was very much of an assured, confident and jovial man liberated from constraint around his language, his behaviour and even his appearance – Miller was notorious for his brash and narcissistic dress–sense. Miller's songs – such as "She Said She Wouldn't", "Mary from the Dairy" and "Every Sunday Afternoon" – appear to lie squarely in the 'song and supper' room tradition of bawdy for

men, by men, about sexual conquests over women.

"She said she wouldn't – I thought perhaps she would

She said she couldn't – I'd an idea that she could

She said I'd like to, but I'm not that kind of kid

She said she didn't – I soon found out she did!"

In contrast to this, a large number of Formby's songs, and much of his comedy, centres around his inability to make such conquests. This contributes again to the sense of harmlessness around Formby, allowing him to contain sauciness and rudeness in his songs and his comedy, to include a large degree of sexual content in his songs, without becoming unacceptable to an audience that is diverse both in terms of class and gender. It is notable that Formby's film career blossomed whereas Miller's was unsuccessful, and that Formby did not face the difficulties with broadcasting that Miller did. Miller was in fact banned from the BBC for almost a decade having told the following joke on air:

"I was coming to the theatre tonight on my bicycle, and I saw a young lady coming towards me. If I hadn't tossed myself off I'd have been into her"[19]

However explicit this may be, it would be inaccurate to portray Formby's material as less sexual – examples of songs that demonstrate his frankness would include "She's got two of everything", "When I'm Cleaning Windows", "I wonder who's under her balcony now" and "Madam Moscovitch" (which concerns a Russian prostitute posing as a fortune teller):

Interestingly, on its release the BBC placed a ban on "When I'm Cleaning Windows", but this was withdrawn when it was found that the song was enjoyed by the Royal Family[20]. Formby's songs contrive to include bawdy material in an unthreatening

way, notably in that in these songs, Formby typically plays a passive role of giggling voyeur rather than that of sexually confident seducer more typical of Miller.

However, Miller himself was a highly successful performer, and by no means only appealed to men. It might be argued that Miller achieves this appeal through projecting an image of sexual confidence but mollifying this masculinity through his camp demeanour, notably in his celebrated chintzy clothing. Thus, Formby and Miller can both be seen to be finding very different ways of including sexual material in a way that isn't threatening or offensive to a diverse audience, through mobilising different articulations of their own gender.

One of the tasks of the early music hall was to find a way of incorporating a tradition of bawdy songs for men that excluded women (the 'song and supper' rooms), into an entertainment form that sought women and children as consumers. It is as though the contrast between Miller and Formby demonstrates that this struggle continues to be played out in the arena of entertainment. We can in fact recognise the same tensions in the early years of the cinema, as the medium began to reach towards respectability (as has been well documented[21]). Promotional material for the cinema around the turn of the century conventionally included a very explicit disavowal of vulgarity, in order to achieve a broad appeal:

> "Refined Entertainment for man, woman and child"[22]
>
> "Ladies and Gentlemen are cordially invited to this theatre. No offensive pictures are ever shown here. If annoyed when here please tell the management." [This is accompanied by a picture of a man tickling a woman under her chin, as she throws up her arms in protest][23]

"Moral and Refined. Pleasing to Ladies, Gentlemen and children."[24]

"NO SMOKING PLEASE! It annoys the LADIES."[25]

From my analysis of the sequence in I See Ice, I would suggest that if legitimate culture pulls on an aspirational urge, it is as though entertainment pulls on an opposing urge, to debunk the value of social aspiration, and to celebrate vulgarity. We might suggest that Formby's success was partly due to the construction of a persona who could do this in an unthreatening way for every section of British society. I believe that looking at this sequence has allowed us to extend and develop Hoggart's notion of "debunking humour" into a theory of vulgarity, which I am positing as a central component of entertainment. The vulgarity of entertainment works by breaking down the respectable distance that is characteristic of Art, encouraging a degree of familiarity between text and spectator that would be intolerable to legitimate culture. Quite frequently, vulgarity manifests itself more obviously, by enacting a kind of revenge on respectable values through the presence of vulgar content. The oppositional aspect of this content is perhaps most obvious in the not infrequent moments where this vulgarity is specifically directed at the cultivated, as in the sequence I have looked at.

BRITISH BROADCASTING AND TRIVIALITY

I would like to locate some of the discourses around television with reference to these two opposing cultural strategies - the quest for cultural worthiness, associated with bourgeois aspiration, in contrast with the prioritisation of popularity, associated with a vulgar lack of concern for respectability and critical recognition. British television might seem to invite this approach, in that these two tendencies can be very broadly associated with the differences that for a long period of time were heavily marked between the BBC and the ITN - differences both in programme tone and content, and in the perception of the companies by critics and the public.

To explain the history of these differences, let us turn to the debates surrounding the introduction of commercial TV to Britain, and in particular the government report on broadcasting that was made shortly after its introduction. This, the Pilkington Report[1] of 1961, represents a particular moment of cultural anxiety, a privileged expression of the concern about entertainment that the popularity of ITV, at the expense of the BBC, had exacerbated. If we turn our attention to this concern with an awareness of the symbolic struggles that Bourdieu locates in culture and the discourses that guide and support the cultural industries (and the cultural "game"), it should be easier for us to perceive the conclusions and advice of the report as rationalisations.

Before turning to the text itself, I would like to say a little about the context within which it was produced. It is generally accepted that among the members of the committee producing the report, one of the strongest voices was that of Richard Hoggart. At this time, a year prior to the institution of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Hoggart was a senior lecturer (in English) at Leicester University. The Uses of Literacy had been published a few years previously (in 1957), and we

must assume that his presence would have been taken as a gesture toward democratic and non-elitist policy-making, given his association with the working class, and with popular culture. As we shall see, however, the Report is dominated by the same objectifying dread of a uniform mass culture, the descent into which must be guarded against. As such, the Report can to a large extent be seen as bringing the assumptions behind The Uses of Literacy directly into actual policy-making.

The Pilkington Report generally supported the BBC and attacked the ITA (to become ITN), which was seen as not properly fulfilling its social responsibilities as a national broadcasting - "[ITA's] is a success which can be obtained by abandoning the main purposes of broadcasting"[2]. Criticism of the new commercial service is based upon four central failings: ITA is seen as: a) not sufficiently conscious of the effect television is perceived to have on social values and society; b) not sufficiently offering **choice** and catering to minority interests; c) seeking mass audiences at the expense of taking into account the amount of pleasure of **degree of interest** taken in programmes by its spectators; d) producing programmes that are **trivial**.

Clearly, these four points are related. It is because television is perceived to have a direct influence on the viewers' attitudes that it has a duty to cater to "minority interests". It is important to note the ambiguity of this phrase, whose usage in Pilkington does not exactly correlate with the more usual modern usage - notable for instance in the debates around the introduction of Channel 4. It tends to refer to the cultured or aspirant few, rather than a socially disadvantaged or oppressed group. The term is not used in order to engage with a political argument about providing a representative service that caters sufficiently to (say) ethnic or sexual minorities, but with a set of assumptions about the desirability of gaining artistic and cultural capacities and tastes. Thus, "in emphasising that society shapes television [the ITA] do

not allow nearly enough for the medium's capacity to reveal new perspectives, for the broadcaster's consequent responsibility to realise that capacity - and, in doing so, to enable a more fully informed audience to choose more freely"[3].

Clearly, the "choice" here is by no means innocent, the freedom it celebrates rather dubious. Incidentally, we should again note the different overtones this language has here from its present-day usage by those supporting the deregulation of broadcasting: this is not freedom of choice within a context of free enterprise and an open market, it is the freedom to make a specific choice in the direction of legitimate culture over mere entertainment. In fact, convinced of the influence television brings to bear upon its spectators, the report is not so much characterised by fear of abuses of this influence in general, than by the intention of steering it in a unified and specific direction. Embodied in the idea of freedom of choice for the viewer in the Pilkington Report is a vision of television as a sort of tool with which to instil a desire for cultural discrimination in the masses: "those responsible for programme planning must strike the right balance between catering for the existing tastes of viewers and challenging their capacity to develop new ones"[4].

The assumption that there is a discrepancy between these two sets of tastes, that there is, as it were, a stable and fixed "popular" taste which one must be educated away from, informs the third area of attack - the degree of interest shown in programmes must in this case be an effective measure of the degree to which the television service is performing its duties. This is because it would only be the demanding, cultural programmes that would require this interest. Clearly then, for Pilkington, these duties are educative and aspirational. ITV programmes are criticised because they "nearly always appealed to a low level of public taste", and the report is

concerned that therefore the public "will be kept unaware of what lies beyond the average of experience"[5]

Thus a division is produced between two sets of programmes. The first of these are demanding, only appreciated by those with a special interest, but the degree of interest they have is great. These programmes are culturally valuable and worthwhile. Against this, there is a low level of easy programmes, that are universally accepted, and immediately popular, but worthless. Thus, the categorisation of these programmes as "trivial", and this designation being the central element in the attack on them, is heavily overdetermined: what is at stake here is the cultural status of television, and its class affiliation. Because ITA had largely introduced them to British broadcasting, quiz games are seen as privileged examples of this type, the "forms of programme which particularly lend themselves to triviality"[6] I will quote at some length:

> "Many organisations strongly disapproved of independent television's quiz programmes. The charge was that they relied for their appeal on the suspense caused by the large sums or valuable prizes at stake rather than upon the interest prompted by the quiz itself, and that they were, as programmes, of little or no intrinsic worth. Representations put to us showed a general concern, too, at the moral effect - especially on young people - of a regularly repeated demonstration, in an atmosphere of synthetic excitement and artificial good fellowship, that large rewards were to be won for little effort"[7].

It is clear that the aspect of these programmes that this description highlights, is their vulgarity. Suspicion is centred on an event that produces a temporary atmosphere of excitement and "good fellowship". It is as though these vulgar texts, struggling to construct themselves as opposed to the cultural, are misperceived as an

unsuccessful cultural endeavour. Thus, if the quiz itself had properties that were demanding, if it had educational aims, it would have an "intrinsic worth" that would legitimate the spectators' and the participants' interest and involvement.

Such passages in the report make it clear that what is at stake is the "classed" nature of television, and the cultural identity of the two channels. The attack on ITA, clearly, articulates an already conventional position within a debate around commercial television that had long preceded its actual introduction, a position corresponding to an attack on the characteristics that distinguish "low" culture. An important figure within this debate was Christopher Mayhew, a Conservative MP, strongly opposed to commercial television from the standpoint of defending indigenous respectable British culture from an onslaught of American entertainment or a British copy of it. Thus, in an address to the National Council of Social Services at a conference on "The Social Implications of Television"in 1958:

> "Mr Mayhew referred to a criticism that 'our television screen had become choked with dead cowboys', and said it was the gangster film, the western, the quiz show and variety that now dominated the peak hours of viewing on commercial television, and also to a lamentable extent on BBC television" [7a]

Mayhew goes on to make this case in some detail in his booklet Commercial Television – what is to be done? . Here he refers to a statement by Val Parnell, at that time Managing Director of Associated Television that "London can become a second Hollywood", and reacts with horror:

> "Mr Val Parnell, ... holds Hollywood up as an example for London, and apparently sets out to liberate Londoners from their provincial habits of speech, manners and dress, and from their backward and insular culture.

> Unlike Mr Parnell, however, most British people regard American television not as an example, but as a deadly warning. While welcoming a fair ration of American television programmes, they regard with horror the possibility of creating in Britain a hybrid mid-Atlantic culture based on the approach to television which Mr Parnell describes.
>
> Vast fortunes can be made by those who can show on British screens programmes which have already paid their way on the American market. But those who care for television standards and for the British way of life will do their utmost to put a quick end to the kind of developments Mr Parnell describes"[7b]

Despite the form Mayhew's criticism of commercial television takes, as a patriotic affirmation of authentic British culture under siege from a foreign poison, in fact we can see that it parallels debates dating back at least as far as the nineteenth century, and which are rooted in a conflict existing within the British cultural field. Effectively Mayhew, and Pilkington, represent a twentieth century representative of the Victorian middle class commentators on popular culture, keeping it always under scrutiny, seeking always to ensure that it is morally and educationally uplifting. Essentially, this position is opposed to the vulgarity of commercial television - that it does not seek cultural worth.

This hostility to the ITA, in fact, was familiar enough for The Pilkington Report to attempt (rather awkwardly) to pre-empt the accusation of just falling into snobbery - "[the ITA] seemed sometimes to assume that the charge [of triviality] was inspired by 'high brow' assumptions, and was levelled at certain classes of light entertainment programmes - quizzes were quoted as an example - rather than against a lack of

essential worth in programmes of whatever kind"[8]. This argument is somewhat flimsy, given that particular types of programme certainly were regarded with more suspicion by Pilkington - for example drama programmes are treated as inherently having more worth than game shows, in that they are not expected to demonstrate the same level of adherence to laudable ideals.

But more than this, Pilkington fails to understand the nature of the shows it criticises. Vulgar content is not an accidental, removable flaw in the new quiz shows. Instead, their whole purpose is to draw out a contrast between entertainment (as embodied by them) and culture. The traditionally respectable reputation of the BBC, along with it history of aspiration towards cultural and educational worthiness, is in fact a gift for the ITA, allowing it to define itself as authentic entertainment, pre-eminently vulgar, offering a sense of freedom from respectability, of belonging to a community rather than aspiring as an individual. In order to articulate this construction, ITV programmes must adopt the classic strategy of entertainment, to include enough vulgar content, enough material that makes it clear we are not concerned with cultural worth, to make the texts appear rebellious, despite in fact being highly contained.

The cultural determinants underlying the Pilkington Report might be seen more clearly if we contrast it with another voice that was emerging within television debates of this period, that of Mary Whitehouse, who began her famous campaigning career in 1963, forming the National Viewer's and Listener's Association in 1965 (her book Cleaning Up TV, from which I quote here, was printed in 1967[9]). Whitehouse has a concern with ethical issues relating to programme output, just as the Report does. Both aim to eliminate the danger that they see the television service as posing to the people, and to reform the service so that it does social good. Interestingly, however,

Whitehouse takes a position diametrically opposed to that of the Report, very clearly directing most of the criticism toward the BBC. During a decade when the BBC was increasingly aiming at being creative, modern and innovative, and therefore deliberately sought to be daring and challenging, Whitehouse favours ITV programmes precisely because of this desire of the BBC to be culturally prestigious. According to Whitehouse, referring in this case to Nell Dunn's play Up the Junction (broadcast in 1965) the BBC's artistic intentions have led it to become socially irresponsible:

> "There is a code on violence. There is a convention on sex. There is a general agreement on 'family viewing time'. The danger is that these principles have now been abandoned in favour of the encouragement of youthful writers intent on shocking their audiences, rather than entertaining them."[10]

In fact, it is her plebian position, her avowed lack of concern about artistic merit, that allows Whitehouse to take this position, from which she questions: "is it callous indifference which puts the expression of a personal ego before the well-being of a whole generation?"[11] Furthermore, her relative approval of the ITA is precisely on the basis that they have not valorised the artistic integrity of the programme makers, but on the contrary that they have taken a more commercial approach, being ready to compromise their intentions and modify their output to correspond to the wishes and concerns of their viewers - "the BBC's inexplicable deafness to protest is in sharp contrast to the ITA's sensitiveness on the same point"[12]

The difference in the arguments made by Whitehouse and the Report highlight the fact that the Pilkington Report had a different set of standards for what was seen as creative and artistic programmes from those it had for programmes of low cultural prestige, and demonstrate its true agenda. Essentially, the Report is an attack on

vulgarity, and aims to ensure that broadcasting is used as a medium of cultural aspiration. The determination to ensure that television helps elevate the taste of the masses is not made explicit, and thus becomes confused with a discourse around avoiding the damaging effects of television. It also makes it very hard for the Report to conceive of how television could be responsive to the demands of the public, rather than the values of the traditional "great and good".

The contradictions in the Report, and they could be extended to British discourses around the cultural function of television in general, especially those coming from the BBC, suggest some questions about exactly what place television has in the cultural maintenance of distinction - both in the sense of authenticating and affirming the conception of a taste that is only accessible to a small number of people, who are thus qualified with the ability to recognise and appreciate art, and in the sense of a framework of class identities and boundaries that are thus reproduced and validated. The initial aims of the BBC, before being supposedly compromised by entertainment and commercialism, seem quite contradictory in relation to this. Some comments by Bourdieu are of interest in relation to this:

> "Intellectuals and artists are... divided between their interests in cultural proselytism, that is winning a market by widening their audience, which inclines them to favour popularization, and concern for cultural distinction, the only objective basis of their rarity; and their relationship to everything concerned with the 'democratization of culture' is marked by a deep ambivalence which may be manifested in a dual discourse on the relations between the institutions of cultural diffusion and the public."[13]

The weaknesses and contradictions of the BBC's cultural project might be attributed to this 'dual discourse' which appears to mark, not only the writings and lectures by BBC staff, but also the nature of the programmes. Notable is the subgenre of the quiz show - the educational or cultured quiz. These were an essential part of BBC (radio and television) programming from its early history, but following the introduction of commercial television, were then used to counter the popularity of ITV quiz shows, aiming to equal their success but still uphold a difference between the BBC's educational quiz shows and ITV's trivial, culturally valueless quiz shows. Thus the BBC is increasingly forced into a position where it has to compete for its audience, while trying to hold on to its cultural identity.

This ambivalence is also clearly present in the Pilkington Report, which is faced with the quandary of wanting to support the BBC service and attack the ITA service, but with the knowledge that ITV's popularity was not only placing the licence fee system under threat, but was also altering the nature of BBC programming, as they were increasingly being forced to compete with the ITA. The standard history of British broadcasting would have it, in fact, that it was from this point that the BBC lost its elitism through being forced to cater to a popular taste, and engage in a ratings battle with the ITA. Christopher Dunkley, supporting the changes thus brought about - "with hindsight a spot of lowering, or more accurately perhaps broadening, seems pretty much what was called for"[14] - argues this as follows:

> "The effect of ITV's successful raid on the audience was indeed to 'lower' the median level of British broadcasting. In order to win the audience back the BBC had to learn how to modify some of its existing programmes and, more significantly, try to make programmes which could compete successfully against soap operas, game shows, and schmaltzy variety. For the first time in the history

of British broadcasting, ratings had become very important… Now the BBC was obliged to start learning how to meet the demotic appeal of commercial television by developing its own brand of populism."[15]

However, David Cardiff, in his article "Mass Middlebrow Laughter: the origins of BBC Comedy"[16], problematises this perception, suggesting that broadcasting was from a far earlier date having to take on board the question of accessibility and thus from the outset being involved in a project of "cultural proselytism", placing it in a highly ambivalent relation to culture. According to Cardiff, BBC radio was marked from its early days by a tension between "the impulse to enlighten and the pressure to entertain"[17]. In particular, he looks at the central role comedy played for the BBC, in winning a mass audience.

Cardiff claims that the nature of the radio comedy that developed on the BBC was related to the rapid growth of a modern, suburban middle class during the inter-war period. The BBC audience became dominated by the middle classes between the wars, and Cardiff argues "it was demands from this class for more popular programmes which shaped the BBC's light entertainment policy"[18]. During this time, the middle class were increasingly seen as representative of the nation as a whole, and Cardiff looks at the development of a new concept within cultural discourses during this period, that of a specifically "middlebrow" culture, examples being the work of Noel Coward, or the numerous attacks on intellectuals in Punch magazine.

> "Middlebrow culture has always derided what it aspires to. In this ambiguity lies its strength. It draws enough vulgarity from the lowbrow to cock a snook at the highbrow, and enough culture from the highbrow to keep the lowbrow at bay."[19]

Placed in this mid-way point between the lowbrow and the highbrow, this middlebrow clearly falls within the field of entertainment we have delineated, following from Adorno and Horkheimer, as an area of culture that defines itself against legitimate culture, yet refrains from allowing itself to express pure festivity, or to completely abandon restraint. We have already seen the use of the term by Bourdieu, for whom it has an affinity with the *petit-bourgeois* and their cultural insecurity. Cardiff regards the middlebrow in a more positive light, and gives an important account of the development of this form of entertainment in Britain, and its affinity with the broadcast media. Following from work by Simon Frith[20], Cardiff argues that the BBC played a central role in articulating and defining the middlebrow. This articulation of a middlebrow culture, and the placing of itself within this arena, was not an attempt by the BBC to embrace pluralism, in order to cater to a diverse audience. On the contrary, it was very specifically aimed at the dominant class fraction of the audience - both working class and upper class audience members were at risk of being alienated from television by the increasingly middlebrow nature of BBC output. The BBC were thoroughly identified with the middlebrow by external commentators - Cardiff quotes the first known usage of the term from Punch in 1925, as follows:

> "The BBC claim to have discovered a new type, the 'middlebrow'. It consists of people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like."[21]

Thus, the concept of the middlebrow was used to explain the growth of cultural forms that expected some awareness of legitimate culture from their audience, yet were not in themselves seen to be of cultural value. For Cardiff, such a cultural awareness was central to the growth of this new form of a popular culture:

> "[The middlebrow] may refer to forms which appeal to a middle class public which is educated to a degree but not highly cultured. This public may aspire to high culture or it may ignore it, but it is at least aware of it, even if it lacks either the will or the means to assimilate it. It is thus characterised by a certain 'knowingness'. This 'knowingness' separates middlebrow from popular culture because it permits a range of allusions which is beyond the reach of the less educated."[22]

Responses to this culture varied according to one's cultural status. Thus, figures from the world of high art tended to attack the middlebrow as an adulterated form of culture - Virginia Woolf criticised the BBC's popularisation of culture, calling it the "Betwixt and Between Company"[23] Commentators from within the middlebrow were less likely to feel protective about the value of legitimate culture:

> "Through 'knowingness' the middlebrow boasted the capacity to appreciate high culture and intellectual ideas and also the critical acumen to see through them, to dismiss them as of marginal value in the workaday world in which sensible people lived."[24]

According to Cardiff, the creation of a form of comic entertainment that was characteristically middlebrow by the BBC was closely tied to the Reithian approach to broadcasting, with its attempt to popularise high culture, and to educate the public's taste. As he argues, "one of the unforeseen consequences of the BBC's cultural mission was that it made all listeners to some extent 'knowing', even if they were indifferent or hostile to the enlightenment on offer"[25] Furthermore, the solemnity of the BBC service lent itself to parody from an early date, especially given the demanding nature of its educational and cultural material for many listeners. Cardiff quotes from Tommy Handley, the comic, writing in the Radio Times in 1928:

> "The announcer is a constant figure of fun outside the studio: within that grim chamber the announcer must be taken seriously! I have found also that the public enjoy good-humoured skits on the more educational aspects of the programmes."[26]

While early BBC comedy took the form of direct parodies of serious programmes (by the early 1930s a whole series of such lampoons had been broadcast), the first programme to gain a "really popular cult following" was Arthur Askey's Bandwaggon, first broadcast in 1938. Cardiff sees this as the programme that established a set of conventions that mapped out the groundwork for future BBC comedy:

> "Rather than parodying individual programmes, Bandwaggon exploited the listener's familiarity with the basic language of broadcasting, making rapid and bizarre transitions from one set of conventions to another."[27]

Cardiff argues that Bandwaggon was the forerunner of a tradition spanning from ITMA to Monty Python's Flying Circus and Not the Nine O'clock News. These programmes all share a number of characteristics[28]. Firstly, they rely on what Cardiff calls "everyday modernism" - that is, some familiarity with modernist dramatic techniques and cultural knowledge, but which is simply used for comic effect. Secondly, they are self-reflexive, inviting the audience to laugh at recognisable broadcasting conventions, and their seriousness. And finally, they are all marked as cultish, in that the pleasure of the shows relies on familiarity with catchphrases and running gags. Thus, in discussing The Young Ones, Cardiff points out the modernist play in narrativity, and the references to The Brothers Karamazov and King Lear.

"It must be emphasised that these shows are by no means bland... It is only when one asks where the laughter comes from that they are revealed as fundamentally middlebrow."[29]

Cardiff celebrates this tradition, and his re-mobilisation of the concept of the middlebrow portrays it, not as a grey area of cultural lack, but as an arena within which a culturally aware audience can get a breather as it were from the pressure of cultural aspiration. Their cultural knowledge is effectively vulgarised, resigning from its capacity to distinguish them, and simply becoming a source of laughs.

Thus, it is clear that a straightforward polarity between entertainment/ITV versus art/BBC will simply not work. The BBC's attempt to save broadcasting for cultural aspiration is almost automatically doomed - the more that cultural knowledge and awareness becomes mainstream, the less effective it is as a means of distinction. Furthermore, the Reithian project is fundamentally contradictory - while the symbolic significance of cultural taste is based on the act of choice, it relies on precisely a lack of choice - the people should only be provided with culturally worthy programmes. The creation of the middle-brow, however, is a remarkable attempt to negotiate a space that includes both cultural awareness, and a vulgar disregard of cultural aspiration.

From Cardiff's work we might deduce that correspondence of television to Bourdieu's "cultural proselytism" with its ambiguous relation to culture, is less to do with the intrusion of commercialism into a public service, than with the nature of public service broadcasting, which sets itself the impossible task of making "the culture of the elite available to the many"[30] The universal availability of television poses a difficulty for its accession to high culture, pushing it into taking a more ambivalent stance - trying to hold onto respectability and popularity. Thus, for a brief historical period, when television was an exclusive and rare commodity for the middle classes, and was

itself represented as a culturally valuable acquisition, it could itself legitimately harbour cultural aspirations with little sense of conflict. These were problematised with television's increasing availability, accessibility and popularity. The effects of the introduction of a commercial service can be seen as merely a further development of this same process.

Nevertheless, ITA and the BBC can be seen as articulating distinct positions of their own within this culturally ambiguous medium. For many years, these positions were reflected in their respective listings magazines, the TV Times and the Radio Times, which delineated two different ways in which television is expected to fit into the audience's lifestyle. Looking at these magazines as they were to be over the two decades following the introduction of ITV (from the 1960s to the 1980s) we can map out a symbolic struggle over the cultural status of television.

TV Times contrived to be a family magazine that formed a routine part of everyday life. This was reflected in their advertising jingle of the late 1980s: "There's so much more than TV times in this weeks - TV Times". And there was - far more than the Radio Times, the magazine gave space to features such as guides on health and cooking and letters pages. As far as the representation of the television service goes, rather than aiming to give the relevant information on current ITV programmes to allow the viewers/readers to make an informed choice of viewing, the main strategy of the magazine was to identify television in general as a familiar, friendly and indispensable part of everyday life. It is also clear that the magazine's form of address, comparable to that of mainstream women's magazines such as Women's Own, was primarily concerned with the establishment and maintenance of a consensus around moral and social issues - a set of ideas which all normal, reasonable people hold.

These two aspects combine to imply that television is expected to be an everyday activity, one that fits into pre-existing life-styles.

This might be contrasted to the Radio Times which was far less concerned with being a magazine in itself, separate from the programmes. Its articles, which are typically shorter than those in the TV Times, during this time had little function other than that of giving information about forthcoming programmes. This can be explained in correlation with the symbolic importance the ability to choose, the act of choice, has for the project of cultural aspiration. The assumptions about viewing seem to be around spectatorship of any programme being a result of a planned and informed intention. Associated with this is the generally reserved and polite tone of the magazine's form of address to its readers, which contrasts strongly with the familiarity and chumminess that characterises the TV Times - and on a purely visual level, the Radio Times comes across as drab, restrained and conservative in contrast to the brightness and brashness of the TV Times. Television - within this conception - is an apparatus of cultural aspiration, and this approach to television is closely identified with the BBC. To an extent, the representation of television as the provider of universally acceptable, undifferentiated entertainment, that has been more characteristic of ITV, tends to dissipate this capacity of television. That is, if there is seen to be little educational differentiation determining spectator enjoyment of programmes (because "everybody loves a good laugh") then television loses the capacity to reflect cultural credibility (or the lack of it) back onto its spectators. This awareness that it was in its provision of popular entertainment that ITV represented a threat to the BBC and their approach to broadcasting is clear from the response in the Radio Times to the introduction of ITV:

"New Pattern in BBC Television Programmes

It has recently been said in the press that the BBC television light entertainment and variety will be negligible, hardly worth looking at. Politely, but very positively, we disagree with that view. We are not boasting or making careless promises. We simply intend not to be beaten in any aspect of television programmes. We - and you - shall see."

[September 16th, 1955]

The history of this set of differences between the two magazines, which has been a highly visible articulation of the conflict between the BBC's and the ITN's model of the television service, is rather more complicated than we might guess. In the early years of commercial television, its massive success reinforced the already conventional public perception of the BBC as stuff, conservative and elitist. Against this, ITV tended to be seen as exciting, brash, and as somehow free of the constraints that kept the BBC so stifled. This representation is common to those in favour of the new service - essentially, the public, as reflected through letters to the magazine - and to those attacking it - such as the writers of the Pilkington Report. Surprisingly , the early TV Times does not appear to take access to this widely reported and conventionally perceived difference. Instead, it is as though cultural insecurity had provoked a more defensive mode of presentation, by which the ITN aim to dissolve the difference between themselves and the BBC. Thus, comparing the BBC and ITV guides to viewing during the late fifties, there are no very obvious differences, and the tone of TV Times does not really reflect the generally perceived differences between the two programmes. It is not until the sixties that the magazine began to adopt the textual strategies that I have described above.

This development is marked in the appearance of the letters page as a regular feature in the early sixties. The page functions in the magazine to reinforce the communality that the TV Times wants to represent in its readers. I quote a couple of letters that fall into a very typical type of that decade (such letters still appear, perhaps less frequently) - letters that defend the TV service against imagined or real detractors.

> "I often read how people criticise television programmes. But I must say a few words on behalf of the youngsters of today. I think TV is a great help to young children. My two year old, like many others, loves playing with toys and drawing with crayons or helping mummy in her way./ But when TV is on at 5 o'clock she is busy either dancing to the music or thrilled to bits with any cartoon and puppet shows. So I will say for the younger viewers: children's programmes are the tops."
>
> [31st December 1966]
>
> "Here is a simple rule for all TV moaners - if you don't like a programme, switch off! These critics seem wholly ignorant of that knob at the side of the television./ They should try putting that one single programme they don't like against all the other thousands of programmes that give unlimited pleasure. It makes one think a little, doesn't it?/ I know how all these 'moaners' carry on when the poor old TV packs up for a few nights. Three cheers for television and all its staff, I say."
>
> [2nd October, 1965]

Such letters seem less an expression of individual points of view, than an almost ritualistic articulation of 'common' sense. As such, their publication might be seen as a very specific type of use of consensus. There is a marked difference between this letters page and that of the Radio Times of the period, where no such celebrational tone is apparent.

This development of the TV Times during the sixties seems to constitutes breaking away from its function predominantly as a viewing guide, and adopting the conventions and functions of a women's magazine, functions that are strengthened by its alliance with the television service, rather than this relationship being seen as the magazine's only, or even most important purpose. Thus, in its use of the letters page the magazine relies on knowledge of a loyal readership, and assumed set of shared values, and its own taken-for-granted place in the readers' lives.

These elements are also reflected in the discursive strategies of the magazine's own articles. Perhaps their most insistent, and overdetermined, characteristic is the very precise social and cultural position in which they locate the magazine and its readers. To demonstrate this point, I shall quote at some length from an article from 1967, supposedly written by Harry Corbett, publicising a new situation comedy in which he stars.

The article begins: "Ever dreamed you've won the pools (who hasn't)? My new TV character Mr Aitch doesn't dream about things like that. He'd go out and start his own pools firm!". After briefly describing Mr Aitch, Corbett affirms: "Get this straight. The series is for laughs. I am not going to preach anything to anybody". From this point on, the article pays no further attention to the new programme:

> "And the real me
>
> Me and forms and officialdom or pomposity just don't go together. I don't fight it anymore. I just sit back and enjoy it. / … All my childhood life was spent in Ardwick, Manchester, where I lived a very happy slum life at the tail end of the glorious 'thirties. / … I probably worked harder pretending I was busy than if I'd actually been busy. That's a confessed dedication to loafing, if you like… Do

you remember the elaborate lengths you used to go to at school just to 'skive' - the comics tucked behind textbooks and all of the little deviances?"

[31st December, 1967]

It is very obvious from this that the language contrives to be familiar, frank, down to earth. Furthermore, the article becomes less publicity for a specific programme than an autonomous piece about a celebrity - the sitcom, as it were, simply providing an occasion for an article about Corbett, rather than being the subject of discussion. It is striking that the summary description of the programme seems unconcerned with distinguishing it from other programmes, but instead aims to place it within a particular genre, to ensure that it is perceived as being "good entertainment". Moreover, the chatty biography that follows this is continued in the next issues ("NEXT WEEK I'll tell you about those times [in the Royal Marines] and how nobody laughed but me") and runs quite separately from the programme.

In order to highlight the specificity of this mode of address to the TV Times, it is of interest to compare this article with the corresponding issue of the Radio Times, of 28th December 1967. Articles in this issue (as in other issues over this period) are short, on average three or four articles per page, headlined with the channel and time of the programme they describe, sometimes accompanied by a photograph.

"8.15 Radio 1 and 2: Hundredth Night

Tonight Night at the Music-Hall, in the words of its worthy chairman Bill Scott-Coomber (above) is a 'Gala Centenary Performance'. Joint top of the appropriately festive bill are Mr Ivor Emmanuel and Miss Patricia Bredin, two stars who sing as one. The artists and the 'Gentlemen of the Pit Orchestra' will celebrate the occasion by eating a specially baked Gala Centenary Cake. Why not join them for a slice of nostalgia?"

"7.30 BBC2: First with the Full Story

Today BBC2's Newsroom programme is switched from late evening to 7.30 each weekday night and extended to half an hour - and it will soon be seen in colour. Peter Wood, the joint-editor of Newsroom, writes:

'Newsroom is a reporter's programme - reporters working with cameras… We want to offer an informative, interesting and picture-packed opening to an evening's viewing."

The only extended article in the magazine, based on an interview with Alan Whicker, corresponds with a new series of Whicker's World. This piece does start out as a general article about Whicker:

"Whicker's World

The young Alan Whicker always had a far-away look in his eyes. From the age of nine he was sending off to travel agencies for their brochures. When they arrived he would pore over them for days.."

However, it quickly becomes a quite serious and analytic justification of the programme, centred around Whicker's creative intentions, and assessing the function of the show, and its merits. In particular, it becomes a defence of the entertainment-value of Whicker's World, in an earnest discussion where the cultural worth of the programme is seen to be at stake:

"Would he accept the criticism that in his programmes he looks at the gloss rather than the substance of life?

'No, I don't think so, but I still think that the froth and gloss is entertaining… Take the programme on re-marriage for instance. Was that frothy gloss? But it was with do with double-barrelled people, wasn't it.

'It was' corrected Whicker ' with people in the public eye. You cannot say to 15 million people 'Mr and Mrs Jones just got divorced. Do pay attention' They'll say 'WHO?'

But Man Alive does this sort of thing?

'They talk about necrophilia, or 'My daughter's in love with her uncle'. That has a place in television, but it's not the sort of thing I'm trying to do. But you can't compartmentalise: for instance, we had in one of my programmes a drug addict who was also a male prostitute transvestite. You think you've got problems? But we don't concentrate on human tragedy.'"

The question that hovers behind this discussion, as to whether the show is simply trivial nonsense, is a question that simply doesn't arise in the TV Times, which presents entertainment very much for its own sake.

The characteristics of the TV Times that I have highlighted might be seen as part of a strategy by ITN to present itself as truly 'for the people', as entertaining as opposed to the stuffiness of the BBC. It is worth remembering that this same strategy of defining entertainment as against the establishment of the BBC was not new with the introduction of the of the ITV service, but in fact was a strategy that actually developed within the BBC itself, as we have seen in our discussion of David Cardiff's work. For example, Arthur Askey's film Band Waggon (Gainsborough, 1939), based on the BBC radio comedy Cardiff discusses, demonstrates this quite dramatically - its plot revolves around the setting up of a pirate television station whose vibrancy and spontaneity is comically yet pointedly contrasted with the BBC's seriousness and snobbery. Thus, the TV Times fall into an already established discourse that opposes the BBC strategy of upholding cultural superiority.

The difference between the two magazines became less marked during the seventies, as a reversal of strategies took place, the one becoming less vulgar, the other less respectable. It is conventional wisdom within debates around television that during this period the ITN effectively established itself as a producer of 'quality television', essentially through high-budget drama. Thus, Dunkley asserts "Granada also produced Brideshead Revisited and The Jewel in the Crown, probably the two best drama serials ever made for television anywhere.."[31] During this period, clearly, the ITN was becoming concerned to be seen to be purveying something more than simply entertainment. This seems like something of a retraction, a shift closer toward the BBC position, characterised by the ambiguous cultural proselytism Bourdieu discusses. A parallel development in the other direction can be seen in the policy of the BBC in these years. Thus, the approach taken to programming by Michael Grade (who was BBC1 Channel Controller from 1984) is conventionally accepted as being characterised by tactical popularisation - the most famous example of which being the introduction of the BBC soap Eastenders and the thrice-weekly chat show Wogan in order to secure a mainstream early-evening audience every weekday. Thus, we can see in both the BBC and the ITN the desire to destroy the perceived difference between the two services. In this context, the terms 'public service' and 'commercial' broadcasting have become imprecise indeed. In fact, the well publicised competition for audiences that the two companies engaged in took place by each company aiming to produce better entertainment than the other, rather than a different kind of entertainment. It is in fact notable that as both companies increasingly experienced a financial need to compete with the other, their output grew ever more similar, ever less distinct, both being pulled toward the middle-brow, with vulgarity becoming increasingly the norm on British television, not in the sense of being offensive or

obscene. But rather, in the sense of the Reithian ideal losing its dominance, and much programming on all stations seeking to define itself as popular entertainment, rather than prioritising cultural merit.

BAKHTIN'S CARNIVAL

Having noted the inadequacy of Bourdieu's approach to popular festivity and celebration, and having proposed vulgarity as a strategy within modern entertainment texts, through which these texts express some degree of resistance to the process of identifying different areas of culture with different social classes, where are we to look in order to equip ourselves to look more closely at the working of vulgarity within entertainment texts?

In order to look at how vulgarity actually operates within entertainment texts, it is useful to look at Bakhtin's reading of popular festivity. His account of the historical European tradition of carnival is very familiar, and has been hugely influential.[1] Part of its importance for us is that he is discussing a period prior to the development of a discourse of aesthetics, accompanying a division of the cultural field into two opposing worlds of high and low worth. He explores a form of leisure practice that the whole of society supposedly participated, in a way that entertainment can only yearn for. Bakhtin is mostly concerned with the way in which this tradition informed the development of the novel. Here, we are more concerned with the tradition in itself. Vulgarity attempts to simulate something of the licence of this tradition, and entertainment is left with an impossible task of trying to echo something of the licence of carnival within contained and constructed texts, as opposed to the participative and unpredictable experience of true carnival. Bakhtin conducted his work in the context of post-revolutionary Russian formalism, a broad theoretical field which has been influential for modern literary criticism, fostering the trend towards textual analysis.

Bakhtin's work on Rabelais traces the historical origins of the novel in two opposed traditions – on the one hand a popular tradition, and on the other a formal/official one[2]. The capacity of the genre to hold both these sets of elements, with either one having the capability of holding presidence, in a sense justifies Bakhtin's critical motivation – which is to identify those works that are truly progressive. Since the novel is historically rooted in a moment when a popular tradition broke into the

previously elitist literature of the court, it can be seen as (at certain points) a literature of the people, thus validating Bakhtin's position as a revolutionary literary critic. Although this is Bakhtin's central project, it is irrelevant to the present work. However, since an idea of popular humour and the carnivalesque is so important for Bakhtin's account of literature, he hypothesises a quite detailed account of popular festivity and carnival, which is extremely useful for us. This account is given most attention in Rabelais and his World, written in 1940 (though not translated until 1965), the first chapter of which explores "the history of laughter"[3].

The immediate advantage of Bakhtin's explanation is his refusal to take laughter as natural. Instead, he highlights the different characteristics and different functions it has in different historical periods. Thus Bakhtin attacks another critic's – Febvre's – explanation of Rabelais' philosophy, because in it a historical perspective is only applied to serious elements, as if jokes were "nonhistorical and unchanging". He complains that "the author seems to think that laughter is the same in every time and age, that a joke is always just a joke", and rhetorically asks "do we of the twentieth century laugh as did Rabelais and his contemporaries?"[4]. Bakhtin himself, on the contrary, demands an understanding specifically of Rabelais' humour. Criticising another Russian reading of Rabelais, by the pre–revolutionary Veselovsky, that relates his work to the Reformation (given his friendship with its leaders) Bakhtin claims "Rabelais' work expressed basically the most radical interests, hopes, and thoughts of the people, which had nothing to do with these relatively progressive movements of the aristocratic and bourgeois Renaissance"[5].

Bakhtin takes Rabelais to be truly of the people, then, his work representing a historical moment at which literature becomes informed by the previously non–literary tradition of "popular festive humour" (for Bakhtin, the same moment occurs in English literature with the work of Shakespeare). It is Bakhtin's explanation of this humour, and of the carnival–type activities and celebrations in which it finds its most privileged expression, that demands our attention here. This is because, rather than taking access

to a universal or fixed set of drives, needs, and functions, he discusses a historically specific tradition, one that lasted through the middle ages and culminated during the Renaissance, with its entrance into literature.

Bakhtin claims that it was in the middle ages that laughter, which had previously been incorporated in religious and state rituals, was no longer tolerated in such official ceremonies: a complete separation of two realms took place, that of the serious and that of laughter. This division was the culmination of restrictive tendencies dating from early Christianity[6]. However, "this intolerant seriousness of the official church ideology made it neccessary to legalize the gaiety, laughter, and jests which had been eliminated from the canonized ritual and etiquette. Thus forms of pure laughter were created parallel to the official forms."[7]. The locus of this "pure laughter" was in formalised religious festivals. During these festive celebrations, the hierarchies upheld by the church were inverted, the clergy being subject to (albeit comedic) attack, and submissive, respectable behaviour no longer being demanded of the people. It is as though, in producing the category of the sacred, Christianity had also to produce an opposing category. This is the historical cause and origin of the specific European carnival tradition.

In this reading, carnival would represent a kind of temporary sacrifice of power by authorities to the people. To explain how this seemingly dangerous lapse of authority was tolerated by the Church and the State, Bakhtin quotes a commentary from the Paris School of Theology dating from 1444:

> "Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air. All of us men are barrels poorly put together, which would burst from the wine of wisdom, if this wine remains in a state of constant fermentation of piousness and fear of God.. This is why we permit folly on certain days so that we may later return with greater zeal to the service of God"[8].

Bakhtin refers to this statement as an articulation of an understanding of carnival that was already conventional at this time, one he appears to accept rather

unproblematically himself. We might compare this to the Victorian commentary on the notion of "recreation" quoted in Chapter 1.1. Thus, the Church believed that the participation of the people in licensed foolishness on certain occasions is actually needed, in order to secure their piousness for the rest of the year. An identical understanding of the nature of carnivalesque celebration is still conventional, frequently underlying contemporary accounts of present–day carnivals. For example, this account of the Rio carnival (from Marre and Charlton, Beats of the Heart) gives a rather naïve left–wing articulation of the same idea:

> "Carnival is not about real life: it is about forgetting who and what you are behind a frilly costume and a painted face, in an orgy of music and dance. Subsidized and politically manipulated, it is a safety valve for a society that edges towards explosion. It is a politically harmless means of diverting the energies of the most underprivileged"[9].

It is important to distinguish between the contemporary Afro–Caribbean and Latin American carnival tradition and that of the European religious feasts of the middle ages, but we must note the survival of this explanation of how it is that authority can maintain its hold over the populace in spite of, or because of, allowing specified moments of freedom. The same reading of carnival is being used in these two different cases both by those who identify with the authority, and by those attacking it.

If we accept this argument, which we might call the "safety–valve" hypothesis, we are led toward a rather paradoxical understanding of the relationship between carnival and power. On the one hand, within this representation, it as as though authority is forced reluctantly to tolerate the (as it were, intrinsically) rebellious behaviour of the people who are seen as possessed of and invested with such popular force and strength as to demand an outlet, however stringent the regulations imposed on this by authority. But on the other, it is as though the participation of the people in carnival is essential for the maintenance of the relations of power in society: authority in fact needs carnival in order to secure the complicity of the people. Without carnival

(this hypothesis states) the people would no longer accept domination.

Bakthin accepts this idea of an ambivalent, and essential, relationship between carnival and authority, and he takes the content of these historical religious feasts as evidence. This consisted largely of parodies of the official, sacred church ceremonies; thus the words of the *Magnificat* were sung to street tunes, or more elaborate inverted rituals were celebrated, such as the feast of fools, or the feast of the ass. In this latter, Mary's flight to Egypt was celebrated in an 'asinine mass' which made the ass the protagonist – and in which the congregation replaced the Amen with its braying. Bakhtin claims that such events were not a "negative mockery of the Christian ritual... It was 'man's second nature' that was laughing, the lower bodily stratum which could not express itself in official cult and ideology"[10].

In other words, though carnival appears to be blasphemous and satirical, in fact it does not effect an attack on official rituals. Carnival functions as a space within which those in power are mocked, and the people are seen to gain the power and freedom denied them, but the force of this inversion is weakened by an understanding that it is a temporary period of licence granted by authority. Bakhtin outlines a continuum across which the medieval feast is spread, at one pole being most obviously officially sanctioned (thus the feast of the ass was composed by an "austere churchman"), at the other becoming semi–illegal.

> "Thus the medieval feast had, as it were, the two faces of Janus. Its official, ecclesiastical face was turned to the past and sanctioned the existing order, but the face of the people of the marketplace looked into the future and laughed, attending the funeral of the past and present. The marketplace feast opposed the protective, timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal."[11]

These two aspects are seen by Bakhtin, however, as inseparable, and therefore all manifestation of carnival, however "official", had elements of popular celebration: "every feast in addition to its official, ecclesiastical part had yet another folk carnival

part whose organizing principles were laughter and the material bodily lower stratum"[12].

So within Bakhtin's understanding of "the Renaissance conception of laughter" there are seen to be two separate worlds – "The men of the Middle Ages participated in two lives: the official and the carnival life"[13]. Laughter is taken to be meaningful in itself – "Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter"[14]. Because of this, periods of festivity are, as it were, allocated to the separate realm of laughter, so as to preserve the sanctity of the official realm. In Bakhtin's view, it was this knowledge, also, that allowed literature of the Renaissance to express and participate in the activities of popular festive humour: "Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole... Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness"[15].

Bakhtin sees this attitude to laughter as being lost during the seventeenth century. During this time the official attitude to laughter, which had been determined by the need to delimit potentially dangerous popular festivity, is increasingly characterised by a transformation of it. Laughter is no longer seen to have the capacity to engage with important issues – it becomes trivial. From this time "the sphere of the comic is narrow and specific (private and social vices); the essential truth about the world and about man cannot be told in the language of laughter. Therefore, the place of laughter in literature belongs only to the low genres, showing the life of private individuals and the inferior social levels. Laughter is a light amusement or a form of salutary social punishment of corrupt and low persons."[16]

Bakhtin's history of laughter, as we can see, is also a history of literature (which we might extend to artistic practices in general), one that offers an explanation for the existence of the opposing pair of categories – the respectable and the vulgar. In this history, the development of the Renaissance, by which a folk tradition of the marketplace feeds into literature, finally leads (by the time of the Enlightenment) into a

division of literature into high and low genres. The Enlightenment, as it were, is responsible for the production of the 'light', of genres that presented themselves as trivial.

This conception of a contained and trivialised form of carnivalesque humour is interesting in relation to modern entertainment, which is essentially regarded as "light". Vulgarity, in seeking to look free of rules and constraint, may at times appear rebellious, risky, threatening. But a constant feature accompanying this rebelliousness is the reassurance that this is not really serious, that it is only a laugh. In the next section we will see this process at work in a television game show.

The eighteenth century for Bakhtin represents the period when literature had the least chance of access to the genuinely "universal outlook" of carnivalesque laughter. Laughter's only capacity to have any bearing on the real world is through satire, whose negational nature represents a loss of the true carnivalesque, that asserts and institutes a positive power that is separate from and different to that of authority, rather than being stuck in criticism of it and opposition to it. By losing its celebrational capacity, laughter loses its force, and becomes trivial. "Limited to the area of the private, eighteenth century humour is deprived of its historical colour; true, its relation to the material bodily principle is preserved, but this very principle acquires the nature of a trivial private way of life"[17]. And in Rococo literature "...the gay positive tone of laughter is preserved. But everything is reduced to 'chamber' lightness and intimacy. The frankness of the marketplace is turned into privacy, the indecency of the lower stratum is transformed into erotic frivolity, and gay relativity becomes scepticism and wantonness."[18].

Modern perceptions of the comic, according to Bakhtin, are determined by this process by which a tradition of popular festive humour has lost its essentially revolutionary nature by becoming trivial, and losing its identification with the people. This explains the misreadings of Rabelais that he notes in critics from the Enlightenment to the present. Bakhtin's understanding is of a general parameter

through which a celebrational force – that was perceived as a threat – has passed, becoming harmless in the process.

Following from this account of the context within which it was articulated, and the historical processes it took place within, let us turn to the precise nature of the tradition of popular festive humour that informed Renaissance literature. According to Bakhtin, it has three distinct characteristics. The first of these is universalism, that is, carnival effects a kind of temporary democratisation. This is mainly directed at figures of authority – those with social and political superiority, as well as the Church and the state in general – who are brought down to the same level as the people[19]. Modern commentators on carnival, such as Ivanov[20], have confirmed and elaborated upon this, seeing carnival as ritually inverting the hierarchical order within specific societies or groups in societies.

In breaking down the hierarchical system, then, carnivalesque celebration performs a function directly opposed to that which Bourdieu identifies in modern legitimate culture, establishing and reinforcing social distinction. That is, instead of defining and affirming identities, carnival offers (or imposes) an escape from it. Bakhtin maps out a tradition which, he says, had the aim of dissolving and eliminating, on a strictly temporary basis, the social identity that must be upheld the rest of the time. The whole of the people participate in carnival, and rank becomes meaningless.

This universalism can be seen to operate, in a mild, trivialised form, in the vulgarity of entertainment, with its capacity to address itself to a diverse audience, with a message that at root we are all the same. It draws attention to our differences, but only enough to draw humour out of them, and stops short of being overtly critical of inequality. Thus posh people are seen as objects of fun, rather than objects of hostility.

The second characteristic Bakhtin identifies is the atmosphere of freedom that permeated the celebration. As we've seen, the licence of carnival is, as it were, only granted on condition that privation is accepted for the rest of the year. Thus, feast days "coincided with the permission for meat, fat, and sexual intercourse. This festive

liberation of laughter and body was in sharp contrast with the stringencies of Lent which had preceded or were to follow"[21]. During the feasts, "bacchic", seasonal songs were sung, expressing "a peculiar utopian strain, the brotherhood of fellow–drinkers and of all men, the triumph of affluence.."[22]. It is this characteristic of festivity that gives it its celebrational capacity – carnival's spirit of freedom symbolised, and actually supplied, abundance and absence of want, but this was delimited quantitively, as well as qualitatively. "Throughout the year there were small scattered islands of time, strictly limited by the dates of feasts, when the world was permitted to emerge from the official routine but exclusively under the camouflage of laughter. Barriers were raised, provided there was nothing but laughter."[23]

Again, this feature is essential to the operation of vulgarity in modern entertainment. To a relative extent, different entertainment texts all seek to create a sense of freedom, but always in a contained and limited way. While for some texts the freedom may be as limited as just providing a space to laugh, and possibly the inclusion of mildly rude material, other texts attempt to hold out a (false) promise that they do not in fact obey any rules. This "cutting edge" of entertainment thus always seeks to go further, to be more wild, more reckless, in order to demonstrate freedom against the limitations of what has gone before.

The third characteristic feature of these celebrations Bakhtin identifies is their relationship to the people's unofficial truth. Here, Bakhtin refers to a function that is always opposed to the 'official' aspect of festivity – thus one that necessarily antedates the process of separation effected by Christian authority I have already described. The understanding of this function relies on a prohibitive conceptualisation of the working of power: "as a spokesman of power, seriousness terrorized, demanded, and forbade... Seriousness was avaricious, committed to fasts. When its mask was dropped in the festive square and at the banquet table, another truth was heard in the form of laughter, foolishness, improprieties, curses, parodies, and travesties."[24]. This truth banishes the fear of authority, and, as it were, dissolves subjection: "The acute awareness of victory

over fear is an essential element of medieval laughter... The people play with terror and laugh at it; the awesome becomes a 'comic monster'"[25]. Festive laughter is utopian then – "It is impossible to say where the defeat of fear will end and where joyous recreation will begin"[26].

Again, this is a feature we can see at work, again in a trivialised form, in modern entertainment, through de-bunking of authority, and through the mocking of cultural worthiness. Bakhtin argues that the boldness of a vulgarity which mocks authority gives carnival a revolutionary function. However, the ease with which he falls into this assumption is startling, and contradictory, given the authorisation he has shown the carnivalesque always to be subject to.

Having laboriously established the degree of complicity that carnivalesque inversions and freedoms in fact have with the maintenance of an authoritarian power structure, Bakhtin seems in the end to ignore this ambivalence with an optimism and enthusiasm that we can relate to his historical context of early–middle twentieth century Russian literary theory, anxious to retrieve an essentially revolutionary capacity in the proletariat. From a modern standpoint we can see that both modern entertainment and carnival, represented generally harmless ways of allowing expressions of rebelliousness.

To explore this further, I would like to discuss a short article by Umberto Eco, whose semiotic approach produces a more sceptical understanding of carnival as being directly complicit with dominant values.

Eco's essay "The frames of comic 'freedom' "[27] offers a critique of Bakhtin's understanding of carnival, and compares carnival instead with the classical, Aristotelian understanding of comedy. Here, while comedy is seen to involve, as tragedy does, the violation of a rule by the hero, they are differentiated on the basis of the different attitude we have toward this event. Since we have no respect for the hero, we do not sympathise for him, and can laugh at his misfortune. Eco insists upon a connection between this understanding of the comic and carnival: "By assuming a mask, everyone

can behave like the animal–like characters of comedy... In carnivals even kings act like the populace. Comic behaviour, formerly an object of a judgement of superiority on our part, becomes, in this case, our own rule"[28]. And Eco assumes that the pleasures offered by carnival are the same as comic pleasures: "How do we succeed in finding situations in which we are not concerned with the rules? Naturally enough... by establishing an upside–down world... At this point we feel free, first for sadistic reasons (comic is diabolic, as Baudelaire reminded us) and second, because we are liberated from the fear imposed by the existence of the rule (which produces anxiety). Comic pleasure means enjoying the murder of the father."[29]

Here Eco is in broad agreement with Bakhtin's assessment of carnival (in these quotes he refers to a universalism brought about through inversion, and the freedom thus produced), and bringing Aristotle's work on comedy into play increases our understanding of how carnival works, giving a psychological explanation of how it is that a feeling of liberation is effected. However, he goes on to attack Bakhtin's own naïve utopianism: "There is something wrong with this theory of cosmic carnivalisation as global liberation"[30]. An assumption that humour has within it a kind of essential rebeliousness that poses a threat to the state must be questioned. For Eco, the present–day deployment of entertainment by the state makes it obvious how suspect this notion is – "today's mass media, undoubtedly instruments of social control... are based mainly upon the funny, the ludicrous, that is, upon a continual carnivalisation of life. To support the universe of business, there is no business like show business"[31].

In the face of this quandary Eco returns to the tragic/comic opposition. Tragedy appears to be more universal than comedy – we can appreciate Eastern tragedy, or ancient tragedies, but have more difficulty understanding the comedy of cultures other than our own. This is because the tragic effect is dependent on the production of "the common and the intertextual frames whose violation produced the so–called tragic situation"[32]. Thus tragedy always ends up re–stating the rule of law, whereas comedy relies on the 'norm' being presupposed and unstated.

In other words, according to Eco, comedy – and in that case carnival also – does not escape from the law. Rather, in refusing to state it for the sake of an effect of freedom, it is forced to take it for granted, as an absent structuring device. This textual principle, Eco continues, "explains why the so–called comic or carnivalesque 'liberation' appeared so suspect. Carnival, in order to be enjoyed, requires that rules and rituals be parodied, and that these rules and rituals already be recognised and respected... Without a valid law to break, carnival is impossible"[33]. He concludes that carnival, and comedy, reinforce the law. Carnival is an event held by participants who cannot envisage liberation as a tangible possibility. The temporary freedom from constraint, the temporary accession to power carnival provides, cannot be capitalised upon because the subjects of carnival cannot imagine that these could be permanent, or that those in authority might not be in control of the people. Carnival cannot take place outside of this framework, and only appears subversive when seen from a position external to it. In fact, the apparent rebelliousness of carnivalesque festivity is wholly complicit with and supportive of dominant power.

Eco's essay is at fault, however, inasmuch as he ignores the essentially historical nature of Bakhtin's analysis. Thus, he takes for granted an exact equivalence of function between the tradition of festive humour Bakhtin refers to and the modern "comic" – both of them, he claims, have a carnivalesque nature.

On the contrary, I want to accentuate the difference that Bakhtin's work suggests, the historical changes in nature and function he shows laughter and celebration to be subject to in different historical periods. Following from this premise, I would like to use a periodisation suggested by Foucault to express the idea that entertainment might be operating in an altogether different power structure from carnival.

Foucault's work describes the historical change from the Classical age – from the Renaissance to the turn of the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries – to our present Modern one. In his preface to The Order of Things he states, in words that mirror

Bakhtin's – "The order on the basis of which we think today does not have the same mode of being as that of the Classical thinkers"[34]. Foucault explains this difference on the basis of a "positive unconscious" of knowledge within a given period[35], a body of motives and constraints behind the formation of concepts that can be reconstructed retrospectively though they are never articulated as they operate. This understanding in The Order of Things has a clear political objective. There is a two–fold movement in the book that on the one hand constructs the context within which Classical science had a meaning, made sense; and on the other demonstrates that Modern science, in its turn, is similarly produced within a set of regulatory conventions that only allow certain things to be said, and is therefore in no way an objective expression of natural truths. Thus a teleological history of science that would portray the gradual progression and advancement of knowledge in the direction of truth is discredited.

In Discipline and Punish[36] Foucault turns more directly to the different construction of power relations within these two periods. Foucault wrote this book after his involvement during the early nineteen–seventies with the Group of Information about Prisons, a French campaigning organisation that aimed to bring the voice of the prisoner into play within prison reform. The basis for this approach was a refusal to "speak for the prisoners, to name their discontents, to become the subject of their oppression"[37]. This strategy aimed to counter the process through which emprisonment punishes by silencing and hiding the criminal. In Discipline and Punish this mode of punishment is seen as characteristic of the Modern age, whose adoption of imprisonment as a universal punishment parallels a changing distribution of power relations in society. Foucault shows that at the beginning of the Modern period the model of the ideal prison was seen as one in which the prisoner would always be observable – Bentham's Panopticon was architecturally devised with a centralised point from which all the cells are visible, so that the prisoner must assume his every action is being seen. Wholly subjectified, the prisoner represents a paradigm for the Modern subject: in fact, according to Foucault, the hierarchy that is obvious within a prison

mirrors that hidden within apparently benevolent institutions, such as the school.

Bakhtin's understanding of the relationship popular celebration and festivity had with religious authority and political control in the Renaissance has certain immediate resemblances with Foucault's analysis of the place of public punishments within the sovereign state of the Classical period. In contrast to emprisonment, these "spectacular" punishments are characterised by a fundamental ambivalence. On the one hand, they appear to suggest an almost complete hold by the state on its subjects, executions in particular operating as a privileged moment within which the strength of sovereign power is openly displayed. Thus the book opens with a graphic description of the execution of a regicide in the mid–eighteenth century which, functioning as a public spectacle, demonstrated the strength of the king, and his total rights over this man's body. On the other, they provided a sort of localized and limited arena within which the power of the people became manifest: thus a more or less conventional procedure existed by which the people could either appropriate the act of punishment as their own (rather than the State's), or on the other hand call for the execution to be abandoned (sometimes successfully). Each of those actions could result in an extreme situation whereby the meaning of the public ritual would be transformed – that is, the people could lynch the executioner and kidnap the condemned, either to kill him themselves, or to set him free. This ambivalence seems to correspond to that which Bakhtin uncovers in the carnival tradition: coincident with a display of power that portrays itself as all–powerful and inescapable, and that is maintained through terror, there is a specified point of festive liberation. This total, absolute, openly acknowledged power and authority over the people is seen to involve the inclusion of moments when this hierarchy is inverted. In both cases, it is as though the state secures its continued hold over the people through allowing an unregulated moment of freedom through which their complicity in the state's domination of them is effected.

According to Foucault, this whole system conforms to a system of power that gave way, in his 'modern' period, to a different system. "By the end of the eighteenth

and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the gloomy festival of punishment was dying out."[38] There are two central elements to this overall process. Firstly, in relation to power, it becomes less visible, and slackens it hold over the actual body of the subject. And secondly, punishment as spectacle disappears, and instead becomes hidden away.

This shift parallels the gradual disappearance of traditional forms of festivity in Britain, and their replacement with commodified forms of celebration, supplied by a culture industry. It is clear that in Britain this whole period was characterised by an increasing suspicion on the part of the dominant middle class of the excess of popular celebration - its capacity for festive liberation and for collective rebelliousness. [38a]

The overall movement of these centuries, then, might be seen as one whereby popular festivity becomes harmless by being rendered frivolous. We could characterise this process as a displacement of carnival by entertainment. Chris Rojek, in discussing carnival, is quite specific on this point. Explaining the aim of historical carnival as "the licensed transgression of the everyday rules of social life"[39], Rojek emphasises its universality – "carnival was fun because it was a crowd affair – an all–inclusive affair... everyone was an accomplice"[40]. Referring to modern leisure forms, on the other hand, Rojek demonstrates that "the crowd is now a collection of people with a specialised interest"[41]. Rojek sees the processes of privatisation and individuation that this difference suggests as central to the changes in leisure practices, and clearly the process by which the locus of popular culture has shifted from the street (in carnival) to the theatre (in music hall) to the home (in television) indicates a gradual containment of carnivalesque impulses. As Rojek says: "our leisure is indeed more privatized, individuated, commercialized, and pacified than it has ever been before"[42].

To speak of carnival within this modern social structure must be inaccurate. The localisation of entertainment within the realms of the trivial, and our shift from being participants to spectators, makes it a very different tradition to that of carnival.

However, entertainment can be seen to effect a kind of deception - pretending to give us access to a carnivalesque world of freedom and of rebelliousness. In contrast to the actual construction of an inverted world, where those in power are brought down and identities are temporarily dissolved, entertainment provides a space in which we can all participate, but with no effect on our status, and instead a pacifying reassurance that underneath everything we are all the same, and there need be no conflict between us - our differences are merely comical. Whereas carnival actually allowed its participants a degree of freedom, in relation to their everyday lives, entertainment aims to give an illusion of plenty and of permissiveness, while actually providing nothing more than a promise.

This illusion of carnivalesque freedom and rebelliousness, however, is an important one for light entertainment, which holds it out to us constantly. By pretending to a carnivalesque freedom, entertainment pretends to be based around something other than an act of spectatorship, and gives the air of putting on a party in which we can all participate. In the next chapter, we will look at a particular British television programme that did this very successfully.

TELEVISION AND THE CARNIVALESQUE

"We are here to entertain. We are not making television programmes to hurt people" (Michael Hurll, producer of the Noel Edmonds Late, Late Breakfast Show, quoted in the Daily Record, Saturday November 15th, 1986)

> ***TV MUST NOT EXPLOIT US ALL IN THIS WAY***
>
> Mr Mike Lush, who fell to his death in the course of providing an easy giggle for the BBC, may not have died in vain.
>
> There will not, I suppose, be a statue in his memory. Not even a temporary little thing, made out of plasticine, that might look good, for a minute or two, on television.
>
> A more enduring memorial would be a disinclination among the adult population to demean themselves on the box.
>
> SHAMEFUL
>
> Mr Andy Warhol once said that anybody could be famous for an hour.
>
> Nobody took him seriously except TV contestants who are happy to dress up as camels and slide about on their noses in order to be a celebrity for a minute or two.
>
> There ought to be less shameful ways of becoming famous, even for an hour.
>
> Though often disgusting to watch, greed is understandable. Anybody might act the fool for a half hour for a set of silver spoons or a holiday in Barbados.
>
> In America, there is such a thing as a professional TV contestant who has become adroit at passing the preliminary screenings and displaying their 'personality' in the brief chat with the laughing comperes.
>
> Our contestants are more amateurish, evidently propelled by the urge to be seen as a bit of a sport.
>
> This impulse is mercilessly exploited by all the TV companies who, if they were

properly public spirited, would refer all applicants to a psychiatrist.

DIGNITY

Mr Lush, poor devil, willingly submitted to falling out of a box suspended by a piece of elastic.

He died and will become famous for more than an hour.

He will be famous as the man who demonstrated that human dignity is worth more than an easy laugh, even on prime–time television.

[Jon Akess, Daily Express, Monday November 17, 1986]

This article represents a clear statement of a position that this thesis has spent some time looking at, where the triviality, vulgarity and irresponsibility of entèrtainment is condemned from a culturally and morally superior standpoint. The article refers to the heavily reported death of Michael Lush, a member of the public, during rehearsals for Noel Edmonds' Late, Late Breakfast Show the previous Thursday. In fact, the scandal following this accident resulted in the withdrawal of the programme, despite its immense popularity. Looking at the reportage of the incident we can see two central concerns – a sense of anger or disgust at the BBC's incompetence and lack of responsibility in allowing this to happen, and the question of its effect on Edmond's future career. This second concern, in fact, is the angle taken by another article in the same issue of the Express. Akess' (regular) column appeared on page 9, but a larger article on page 7 ignored the question of responsibility altogether:

"MY NIGHTMARE by Noel

Noel Edmonds spent a gloomy day yesterday sadly surveying the wreckage of his career and wondering where and how to pick up the pieces./ Until last Thursday 1986 had been the happiest and most successful year of his life.."

The press was in a paradoxical position. Noel Edmonds was a major celebrity and the programme had been hugely popular. For his image as a figure of harmless fun to be retained, it would be important for his behaviour not to be seen as the cause of

Lush's death. There was much speculation in the press that Edmonds television career might be over, and Edmonds himself expressed uncertainty about this. In retrospect, this may seem surprising, given that Edmonds quickly regained not only his popularity, but also his image as a celebrity who could safely play with dangerous and daring television events (as was later evidenced in Noel Edmonds House Party). For commentators, there was in fact a choice around whether to identify Lush's death with Edmonds. While there was room for an individual columnist such as Akess to take this firm, moral stance, expressing contempt for the irresponsibility and tastelessness of the programme, not least in its use of members of the public, and everyone involved, none of the newspapers took this unambigously as an editorial line. In fact, the bulk of reportage of Lush's death portrayed it as a tragic occurence for Edmonds himself, in terms of its effect on his career. And Edmonds tended to be distanced from any responsibility for the occurence. Instead, the outrage and indignation of the press was targeted at the BBC.

The coverage of the incident by the Daily Mirror illustrates this point. On Friday, November 14th, the front page headline "Noel Stunt Kills TV Daredevil" appears to tie the incident to Edmonds. However, the article itself shifts responsibility very firmly to the BBC:

> "Last night Noel Edmonds was visibly distressed and said: 'I don't want to talk about it. It's all too upsetting...
>
> Breakfast Show co–presenter Mike Smith said: 'I'm not doing my Radio One show tomorrow in the light of what's happened. I'm too upset and I care too much.' Anguished Mike said he may quit the Breakfast Show for good.
>
> More than three hours after the tragedy, the BBC was unwilling to give details of the incident. It was not mentioned on their 6pm news bulletin.
>
> But the BBC publicity machine was not so shy earlier this week. It said of Michael's stunt: 'This week's intrepid Whirly Wheeler will need to have a head for heights' "

Elsewhere in the same issue, a feature lays into the company even more heavily, under

the title "We warned the BBC, say top stuntmen":

> "The professionals have been warning the BBC to ban stunts on the Noel Edmonds show for over a year.
>
> ..Rocky, 41, said the Stuntmens Guild had written numerous letters to the BBC but none was answered.
>
> "They were asking for trouble and now they've got it. We warned them" he added.
>
> The Late, Late Breakfast Show has produced near disasters in the past...
>
> Producer Michael Hurl promised there would be no more dangerous stunts on the show."

The next day, the story still had front page coverage in the Mirror:

> "TV bosses may face charges over death plunge
>
> BBC chiefs may be prosecuted over the tragic death of daredevil Michael Lush.
>
> They could face massive fines or even imprisonment.
>
> ..as fury mounted over the way the BBC staged the stunt, the Mirror can reveal that they made a series of amazing blunders.
>
> They tried to get Michael to perform a stunt branded even more dangerous than the one that killed him... And when a safety inspector banned it in Bradford they tried again in Clwyd. Again the stunt was blocked.
>
> Police condemned the BBC for the way the broke the news of Michael's death to his widowed mother Vera.
>
> They told her in a phone call without alerting the police – and for almost an hour Mrs Lush was left wondering if she was the victim of a cruel hoaxer.."

The story continued on pages 2 and 3:

> "I'm to blame, says Noel as his TV show faces shake up
>
> WHAT ARE THE BBC PLAYING AT?
>
> The future of Noel Edmonds Late, Late Breakfast Show hung in the balance last

> night as fury mounted over the stunt that killed Michael Lush..
>
> They didn't care says Victim No 1
>
> A girl who was injured in a Breakfast Show stunt 3 years ago claimed yesterday 'The BBC don't give a damn. They just want viewers.'

And Edmonds is quoted taking blame on himself: "Of course I bear some responsibility. It's my show."

By the next week the portrayal of Edmonds by the paper is clear. On Monday, November 17th an article on page 5 headlined "Sad Noel set for TV exile" reports that "His Late, Late Breakfast Show has been axed by BBC bosses because of 25 year old Michael's death..". On Wednesday, an article on page 10, headlined "The Courage of Noel Edmonds", valorises Edmonds for taking responsibility for the accident, sympathising with his position, and placing blame for Lush's death onto the BBC. A reader's letter is printed on the Friday expressing the editorial line of the paper, as well as apparently articulating public opinion:

> "Tragedy Not Noel's Fault
>
> Noel Edmonds has taken far too much blame on himself for the death...The blame rests squarely on the BBC who were responsible for the format of the axed Late, Late Breakfast Show. I hope once Noel has recovered from the shock of the tragedy he will host other TV shows. He is too good to lose."

And on the Saturday, in reporting Lush's funeral, as if to clarify this distance between the BBC and Edmonds, and to affirm that Noel has been forgiven, the paper states: "Michael's family, who may sue the BBC over his death, allowed a wreath from Noel to travel in the hearse".

This reportage by the Daily Mirror is very similar to that of The Sun. This paper's front page article on November 15th is headlined "NOEL'S TV STUNT KILLS MAN", and quotes from Edmonds:

> "I am very grateful that tomorrow's show has been cancelled because I could not have gone through with it. This is not snuff television and we are not in the

game of putting anyone through unnecessary risks.

Noel's co–host Mike Smith was so shocked by the tragedy he cancelled his Radio 1 show this morning. Mike said 'How could I laugh and joke with callers feeling as I am. I would be seen as callous, which I am not"

Its reportage the next day very clearly lays the blame at the BBC, and retains Edmonds as a sympathetic and responsible figure. Thus the front page article is as follows:

"CALLOUS BBC CALL TO STUNT MOTHER

..Vera received a SECOND call from show producer Michael Hurll yesterday. He described the sort of stunt which killed hod–carrier Mike as 'a part of showbusiness'. Mr Hurll insisted later that his astonishing remark on Breakfast TV was not meant to be 'callous or flippant'."

Which contrasts dramatically with an article about Edmonds on page 5, headlined "I'M TO BLAME – SHATTERED NOEL COMFORTS FAMILY". The tone of this article, again, is sympathetic to Noel, and quotes him (as if to distinguish him from Hurll) "I am not an insensitive person who can sit back and say 'Well, that's show business' ".

These attacks on Noel Edmonds Late, Late Breakfast Show BBC by the popular tabloid press contrast strongly with their portrayal of the programme prior to the accident. In general, the tabloids had, in fact, represented the programme as wild and reckless, as a programme that broke all the rules, a programme within which anything could happen. For example, the Daily Mirror described the programme as follows in its TV pages: "Fifty hectic minutes of complete lunacy" (August 18th, 1986); "If you know of a livelier, madder show please don't tell me!" (October 25th, 1986). However, these qualities were celebrated, rather than condemned, and despite the sense of anarchy, the programme was evidently seen as essentially safe.

In the days following the accident, the press had the opportunity to re–assess its evaluation of the programme. And if a point was reached where the press could call for the programme to be banned, and the BBC to be brought to task, it is as though there remained an underlying imperative to save Edmonds as a friendly, harmless

entertainer. This is demonstrated graphically in an article appearing in the Daily Record of Saturday, November 15th, just before the programme was in fact removed:

> "Why the show must be stopped
>
> ..If it returns, it will be a TV programme which carries the taint, the stigma of death.
>
> And how could anyone expect Noel Edmonds to host the show in the buoyant, fun–loving style that has been his trademark throughout his broadcasting career?"

What kind of a show was this, that allowed such a dramatic moment of danger and chaos to break through the controlled safety of the world of light entertainment on British television? In fact, I would like to suggest that the show's central textual strategy consists of simulating the sense of universalism, of freedom, and of mocking authority that are characteristics of carnival, but containing the unpredictable and rebellious nature of carnival in a harmless and tame format. This worked extremely successfully until the Lush accident.

In order to demonstrate this, I would like to examine the programme closely. The following edition of Noel Edmonds Late, Late Breakfast Show was broadcast on BBC1, at 6.15pm on Saturday November 16th, 1985 (a year prior to the programme's withdrawal). I have produced a breakdown of the whole programme, indicating the time of each section:

> *0:00 Credits. Through computer graphics Edmonds is shown in plane flying around gigantic breakfast table cross–cut with shots of stunts from previous shows – motorbike driven through fire, escape from locked chest underwater, etc – ending on giant packet of cereal with Kelloggs–type graphics, Noel Edmonds Late, Late Breakfast Show. Accompanied by light funk theme tune. Moving camera shots of audience, dressed casual, cheering and clapping in studio as Edmonds enters in black dinner jacket and bow tie.*

"Thank you, thank you..And a very good evening to you. Yes, once again the calendar comes around to our big night of glamour – yes ladies and gentlemen, Mr Puniverse 1985. My opportunity for once in the year to feel like Arnold Schwarzenneger [flexing his muscles].."

Edmonds immediately interrupted by buffoon–type man in audience with handlebar moustache and tweed hunting hat, holding small banner – 'Mr Puniverse degrades men', shouting – "This is downright degrading..". Chaos as audience laugh, boo, hit him and pull him down. It's very obviously a plant, and everyone knows it. "I didn't fight in two wars for this!" Quickly Edmonds regains control "..yes, yes – you've had your right of speech there, now would someone like to throttle him please [audience laughs]. Yes, this year's competition has not been without a certain amount of criticism.. And what other delights do we have for you?"

0:01 Brief footage of men in street laughing at poster with Edmonds continuing talking in studio as voiceover ("what are they laughing at?"). Then footage of Paul McCartney singing, who will be here "to talk about his new video. And what agony do we have lined up for some poor unsuspecting member of the public? [black and white footage of bicycle stunt] And as I've said, glamour, in our Mr Puniverse competition" [footage of one of the contestants doing a strip–tease]. As sequence of footage ends we come back to Edmonds in studio as he continues talking "Yes, what's going to happen to that Whirly Wheeler? If I were you I'd get your writing things together ready to write a letter of complaint – [camp upper class voice] we're going to do something awful to him".

0:02 Interchange between Edmonds and Mike Smith on large screen video monitor on wall. Smith is driven in on vintage motorbike, wearing comic period clothing (old goggles etc) "We're at the National Motor Show... We have with us the Whirly Wheeler of the week – Andy Fogg". Fogg has a very upper–middle class voice and demeanour, and Smith tells us he works in computers, and has a Porsche, about which he jokes. Edmonds: "Are you aware of what we're

going to do to you?" Smith goes on to describe the stunt: "We're going to put him inside a crate here for the 'crate escape'. Look at this thing. It's a wooden box, covered in straw, soaked in diesel. He's gonna be chained inside there and we're going to set fire to him". Edmonds: "Oh good" [audience laughs]. Smith: "I thought you'd like that". Smith speaks to Whirly Wheeler and his trainers: "I mean we're being very lighthearted about it – you've done a lot of training haven't you?". Interruption by Edmonds: "Mike, is there any skill involved in this?". Trainer: "We've got it cracked – now we're going to give him a right roasting"

Smith goes on to describe new world record attempt jump over double decker buses by Eddie Kidd. As he speaks, Kidd roars in on bike, over huge ramp, drives just past Smith and others. Edmonds: "I think he wiped your nose." Smith: "I just had a little run on the end there and it was great, he took it off rather nicely". Smith goes on to describe Kidd's success in bike stunts as we see old footage of his previous jump over 19 double decker buses. Smith states he's now trying for 30. As sequence of footage ends we come back to Edmonds in studio as he continues talking "Yes, what's going to happen to that Whirly Wheeler? If I were you I'd get your writing things together ready to write a letter of complaint – [camp upper class voice] we're going to do something awful to him".

0:06 Edmonds introducing another sequence of footage – "Now the stars of the week", asks viewers how the week was – "Did you enjoy yourself or just go through the motions?" [moving camera shows audience laughing]. Footage of Ian Botham, the "dad of the week" – while doing his sponsored walk for leukaemia research he visited his new–born baby. "Prophet of the week – **moi** [old photo of Edmonds as hippy, Edmonds reacts –] Oh no, not that old one!" [audience laughs]. Edmonds goes on to explain that Feargal Sharkey's single is now no.1 in the charts, as clip from a previous edition of Breakfast Show shows him predicting this – audience applaud. Edmonds goes on to read out viewer's

letter – he had told his mum he would buy her a microwave if Edmonds was right [audience laugh]. "Goof of the week", clip of Reagan's slip of the tongue when making a speech for Princess Diana – "We have been able to have this affair with Princess David". "Puppet of the week" – runner up Mrs Thatcher, photo of her holding glove puppet "trying out the next head of the coal board for size". "But the winner, Radio 1 DJ Mike Reid" [photo], who has bought the original Sooty puppet at auction. Footage of Jimmy Connors playing tennis with frying pans – "Afterwards he put his success down to non–stick balls [laughter]". "Nab of the week" – photo of two men dressed as prisoners who, doing a "sponsored jailbreak from Birmingham to Majorca" spotted someone stealing cigarettes and had him arrested. Finally "vocalist of the week" – Edmonds explains how an English language school in Japan uses Frank Sinatra songs as teaching aids, and putting on an exaggerated Japanese accent, jokes: "The Rady is a Ramp, Old Brue Eyes is Black". Then footage of unaccompanied middle aged Japanese men singing 'I did it my way'. Edmonds rounds up and moves to next item: "The Stars of the Week, more for you next week of course. But now for the Hit Squad. And let's finally kill the argument please. Let us please have no more letters, no more phone calls. Let's finally silence the detractors and the dissidents. Yes the Hit Squad is incredibly silly. And to prove it.."

0:11 Footage of bill poster in street – 50's style advertisement with photo of Edmonds holding soda siphon, wording 'Hot and in a tizz/ Try a bit of fizz!/ Ask your local stockist now/ It always gives my show sparkle says/ Wacky Noel Edmonds". As people walk past, the poster squirts. Old people, punk with a green mohican, boy on roller skates, man carrying a box, young stylish black woman – finally a policeman, who smiles and takes out his notepad while examining poster.

0:13 Back to studio audience laughter and applause. "Well, in the last couple of weeks this programme has come in for a degree of criticism. One or two people have said that we're getting just a bit too silly. Now I realise that nobody here

would agree with that [audience laughs], but just in case you do feel that maybe things have been a little too flippant and daft, let's reign it in slightly." Goes on to speak of the "art" of tea slurping – "How long can you slurp an average British cup of tea". Cut to clip of "an expert" – man in mask, with old raincoat and fingerless gloves – slowly and noisily drinking tea with timer on screen. As he finishes Edmonds asks "Could you do any better?". Then to studio audience "Did anybody recognise the tea slurper?". Shouts of "no". Back to shot of man in raincoat [it's supposed to be live but has obviously been filmed earlier], who pulls off his mask to applause from audience. Edmonds: "Ladies and gentlemen, Paul McCartney"

0:15 Dressed smart but casual he enters the studio. Long travelling shots of excited audience. Short comic conversation about tea–drinking. Then Edmonds asks list of questions supposedly taken from audience. "Are you wearing a vest?... How many baths do you have a week?". McCartney gets sarcastic "Oh yes, good question Noel. [Turns to audience] Did you write this? [shakes head] – No". Edmonds insists the questions are from the audience, McCartney reveals that the last time he came to the show everyone said what stupid questions Edmonds asked. Edmonds retaliates: "Some people said you weren't very cooperative last time". McCartney makes camp 'bitchy'–type facial expression eliciting "oohs" from audience. Questions continue – "Do you still enjoy brushing your teeth?" McCartney increasingly sarcastic, more or less good–humoured – "Yes I do, it's good fun that, Noel. These are great questions. It's great fun this, great show this Noel." Last question – "Do you have a favourite soap opera?". McCartney's answer, EastEnders, gets cheers from audience. Edmonds responds "That's made Mr Grade happy". Brief talk about McCartney's video.

0:19 McCartney's video – Spies Like Us.

0:23 Back in studio Edmonds thanks McCartney "for joining the silliness and making it serious for just one moment". Long applause. Lead in to Mike Smith.

0:24 Smith in Birmingham – "Well this is the serious part of the show. As I said a lot of wimps in your audience tonight.." Eddie Kidd attempt at world record is hyped up. As attempt is shown it's suddenly apparent Kidd is crouched over a miniature bike, a foot or so long, going over toy buses. After he falls, Smith asks him if he's going to sue the BBC – "I think I am. Sorry about that." Smith winds up "..real men here in Birmingham but we bow to you wimps out there in your studio.."

0:25 Edmonds introducing "Mr Puniverse" – "Lock up your budgies or they'll suffer from delusions of grandeur... Whose lucky legs will buckle under the weight of the Mr Puniverse crown?". Introduces the judges – the British female body–building champion, Frank Carson (the comic), "the strongest man in Britain, I can smell him from here", Johnathan King (the DJ). Some "boos" for King, which Edmonds ignores. Parade of contestants in studio begins, with accompanying muzak. Each is given a camp costume and appropriate title – 'Mr Wimpo', 'Mr Safety Pin' (baby costume), 'Mr Baggy Pipes' (Scottish costume), 'Mr Tee Pee' (American Indian costume). Each is also in turn described by Edmonds in voiceover – "When he puts his hands on his hips people think he's a coathanger", "His hobbies are making fists at his wife in his trouser pockets" – and makes their own joking self–description (presumably written for them) – "I enjoy model railways but I wish my children would stop tying me to the tracks", "I'm fond of athletics but the last time I had second wind was when I had two rounds of beans on toast", "My friends call me Olympic Flame 'cos I don't go out very often". The contestant are varied in age, very thin, many have effeminate voices. They are evidently unrehearsed, which increases their absurdity, and some forget their jokes, having to take out a paper upon which it's written. The final contestant has a noticeable stutter, which the audience is uncertain whether to laugh at.

0:33 Edmonds appears in front of them introducing next section – "And now we come to the exciting part". This is a pre–recorded video of them in a health and

beauty club, again with Edmonds' voiceover. One is shown getting a "vigorous massage" – being lightly tapped by finger–tips. "Even the safest sunbed is a challenge for the true puny... How long can a real puny stand the heat?". They are shown collapsing out of the sauna. Then they're shown in swimming pool – "And of course there were some tiddlers among them, but they were told not to do it again, and have some consideration for other swimmers." They are shown being caught by women with nets, and given a "light lunch" – fish food is sprinkled on water. "Then a quick blow dry" – one of them is blown over by hair dryer. Finally a work–out with the green goddess from morning television – they fall all over the place.

0:36 Return to studio with Edmonds and judges. Carson – "They say it takes all sorts to make a world, I don't think these lads are included". Female champion – "I think they're all fine examples – of what we should avoid". They select six semi–finalists. Edmonds leaves them, "I'm going to follow the bear", comically walking accompanied by music to the 'Whirly Wheel'.

0:39 Leading in to spinning the wheel, to determine which viewer does stunt on next week's show. "Here we have ten viewers who, for some reason, want to come on and have their lives put at risk by this programme." He spins wheel, talking through it all. Wheel stops at name of Samantha Olney, to huge applause. He gets her phone number – "While I dial it up we can get out her file. [Looking at it] She likes men [laughter]...She'll try anything once." She answers phone, her voice high pitched, hysterical. Edmonds imitates it – "Ooh you've got a silly voice – are you excited?". They speak a little – "We'll probably drown you or set fire to you". Still on phone, Edmonds spins second wheel, determining what the stunt will be. This is openly fixed, Edmonds 'helps' it stop at the right place – 'Light Fantastic'. To suggest what this stunt might be, black and white footage is shown, of a man in a large spinning wheel. Edmonds – "You want to be in there with a man do you, in view of your..uh.." Edmonds rounds up phone call, making another joke about her voice, and leads in to next

section – "And now, what skill–laden stunt does he have for us this week..."
0:42 Smith introducing the Whirly Wheel stunt. By now it's quite dark outside. "He's being manacled, chained to the back of the bike. A lot of people say we're getting a bit perverse on this show, with the amount of chains we use on it, but I must say we have to use the old EastEnders props somehow... he's being put on backwards, and we're gonna push the bike inside the crate, then cover it in all that straw and set fire to the straw. And we reckon he'll have about eight seconds to get out of all those chains and things.." As he's put inside, heroic adventure music starts. The crate is nailed up. "He will burst out of these hopefully within a very few seconds." Smith emphasises the stunt "has never been done by an amateur stuntman. It's been done by professionals but never an amateur. On go the torches and we are alight. Let's start the countdown." Countdown of 8 seconds on screen. Loud alarm sounds as no–one emerges. Smith continues "..the heat is intense. He's gonna have to come out of there soon. We've got the West Midlands fire brigade around in case there's any problem." Finally the Whirly Wheeler storms out. Smith rushes up to him to ask how it was – "Oh tremendous". As the fire brigade put out the fire, an action replay is quickly shown. Edmonds (from studio) jokes "Mike, can we have a view from our camera inside the crate?". Smith winds up "Congratulations, you've been a great Whirly Wheeler, brilliant".
0:45 Applause among studio audience. Edmonds regains control – "What a skilful challenge, but back to the big moment". Judges run through the three winners of Mr Puniverse in reverse order, to massive studio applause and laughter. 'Mr Rice Pudding' – young man in Micky Mouse costume – is winner. Jokes about how he's "totally overcome with emotion". Edmonds asks "Can I give you a kiss?", but as Mr Puniverse assents and pouts he continues "I'll just play with your ears". Carson jokes "I think he'll start on his world tour, which'll go as far as Norwich". Mr Puniverse – "Oh, I've never been to Norwich". Edmonds comically begins to round up – "Well, a dream come true. Touring

Norwich, working with old people..".

0:48 He thanks everyone, speaking to camera – "And thank **you** for joining in this edition of the Late, Late Breakfast Show". Theme music, footage from the stunt and other moments in the programme intercut with applauding audience, behind the credits.

To what extent is this show carnivalesque? Certainly it presents itself as a world separate from the everyday world – a world of excitement, fun and lunacy. The wacky title seems to refer to an exaggeratedly free lifestyle, whose proponents would not wake up until the late afternoon on Saturdays. Similarly, it distinguishes itself from other TV programmes, portraying itself as a show within which anything can happen. And this is precisely a carnivalesque freedom, taken only on the understanding that everything takes place in a world of laughter.

Central to this picture the show has of itself is the sense of anarchy and chaos the show presents. The impression of breaking through the usual boundaries of television is hinted at throughout the show, yet is very strictly contained – as for example when the fake audience member criticises the Mr Puniverse contest. And on this occasion the audience are given a very specific role of pulling him down and shutting him up. It is as though the programme continually risks an explosion, the audience taking over the show, but ensures that it cannot happen. Similarly, the almost continual insistence that anything might happen to the Whirly Wheeler is obviously underpinned by a firm belief that nothing dangerous will in fact take place. A real ambiguity is centred around the figure of the Whirly Wheeler, who on the one hand is set up as a brave hero – ready for excitement and thrills – and on the other hand as a reckless and foolish clown – ready to put his life at risk. This ambivalence surrounds the representation of the stunt itself, which hovers between the comic and the dramatic. In fact, it is as though the programme exists to allow a certain amount of apparent carnivalesque recklessness and freedom onto television in a safe and limited way. The

shock greeting Lush's death is ironic, given the almost continual way in which the show jokes and flirts with the idea of things going wrong.

What audience does this show have? It is clear that the underlying the show is the imperative for achieving a broad and diverse audience, as befits one of the BBC's most successful and popular light entertainment shows at this time. The programme very deliberately demonstrates its own ability to do this - for example, the Hit Squad sequence deliberately portrays a large number of different social types responding to the practical joke. The show can in fact be seen as an attempt to create Dyer's utopian expression of community in a much more direct way than a feature film can. Thus, a community is established which encompasses everyone – the show portrays the whole world laughing - and the viewer at home is encouraged to consider themself a part of this. The programme's strategy is to do whatever it can to encourage us to see it as more than a televisual text, eliciting a mode of spectatorship through which we feel involved in the community portrayed on screen.

There is some ambiguity about who belongs to this community. A moment in another edition of the show (4th October 1986) is remarkable in this respect. Close to the beginning of the show, in Edmonds comic introduction, he states "A happy New Year to all our Jewish viewers". This is followed by a smattering of rather uncertain laughter from a few audience members – Edmonds reacts to this, looking up with a camp look of innocent surprise. The full audience react to this look with uproarious laughter. Edmonds: "I said it sincerely. The fact that they care to fall about laughing is neither here nor there. Happy New Year, and Merry Christmas, Happy Easter and everything else as well." The audience has clearly been set up for this – nothing in Edmond's introduction is not a joke. But the tension here clearly highlights an ambiguity over whether it is alright for the audience to laugh at this cultural difference, over whether Jews are seen as "one of us" – which contrasts starkly with the lack of concern about laughing at Japanese people. Similar moments abound in the programme – in the present edition the same ambivalence occurs over whether to laugh at the Whirly Wheeler's aristocratic accent - and mark the degree of docility of the

audience, in spite of the illusion of chaos, in there is clearly a concern by audience members only to laugh at what is acceptable humour. Articulations of class are remarkably absent from the show, and in general audience members have Southern, middle class accents. It appears as though it is visible difference from this norm that is treated as alien.

Also, it is clear that the studio members, as well as the Whirly Wheelers, essentially represent a youth audience. In fact, I would like to suggest that we might see this programme as, in part, a response to the developments that were taking place during this time in youth–orientated entertainment on British television under the name of "alternative comedy". In order to explore this, I wish to look more closely at the comedy that had been recently identified as alternative at this time. Alternative comedy as such – whose most significant elements were on the one hand a politicisation of comedy, and on the other an inclusion of 'tasteless' material, such as explicitly sexual, violent, and scatological content – was seen as characteristic of only a very small group, specifically those comics associated with the Comic Strip. However, in retrospect we can see that what was seen as specific to them at the time was in fact increasingly representative of a broad range of programmes (not least the Late, Late Breakfast Show).

The employment of the various comedians who were identified as alternative can be seen an attempt by the TV service (ITV as well as the BBC) to latch onto and appropriate new developments in youth culture – in this case the investment of stand–up comedy with political material, that was taking place on an alternative cabaret circuit, the most famous clubs being the Comedy Store and the Comic Strip in London. During the nineteen–eighties, alternative comedy on television passed rapidly through a trajectory from massive resistance by other comics and the press, through a phase of increasing acceptance, to the current position where the difference – once so meaningful – has completely dissolved. For example, let's look briefly at the career of Ben Elton, who at first was thoroughly identified with alternative comedy – in contemporary assessments that portrayed it as a movement, he tended to be seen as its

figurehead. Elton (with Rik Mayall and Lisa Alther) wrote The Young Ones, and after the first series of Saturday Night Live took over as the presenter (during the first series the presenter had changed week by week). His stand–up act was stridently radical, and, perhaps most crucially in terms of the formulation of an idea of alternative comedy, attacked the political assumptions of mainstream comic acts – directing terrific ideological assaults, for example, against the sexism of Little and Large, and on one occasion attacking the sexism in a routine by Jasper Carrott on his own show, Saturday Live, immediately after its delivery. This approach by Elton, and other comics such as Alexei Sayle, led to a very clear conflict. Thus, attacks on alternative comedy by an other comics became extremely conventional:

> Des O'Connor: As a professional what do you think of these so–called alternative comedians?
>
> Bernard Manning: Oh, as far as I can see alternative means no laughs.
>
> O'Connor: That Ben Elton, he gets laughs.
>
> Manning: Does he? [audience laughter]
>
> (The Des O'Connor Show, November 1988)
>
> I thought I'd do some alternative comedy tonight – which means I don't get any laughs but I do roll up my sleeves and shout a lot.
>
> (Jim Davidson, on The Hippodrome Show, 8th March 1989)

Since this time, while Elton has retained a concern with political issues, he does not disidentify himself from other entertainers in the same way, and nor is he generally seen as especially outside the mainstream of comedy, having had a series of comedy shows on the BBC (The Man from Auntie) that have deliberately sought a mainstream audience. This reflects a more general trend – by around 1988/89 the difference of alternative comedy had effectively dissolved in television programming. The television spectacular Comic Relief, in its second year (Feb–March '89) demonstrated this quite clearly. It was presented by two comics who were to some extent seen as alternative in the public mind, despite their mainstream appeal – Lenny Henry (who frequently appeared on and presented the first Saturday Live), and Griff Rhys Jones (whose first

TV appearances were on the satirical Not the Nine–o–Clock News). Nevertheless, there is no sense of alternative comedy as representing an oppositional force to mainstream comedy in this event, which featured appearances by comedians such as the loathed Little and Large, as well as Elton, without any sense of difference. This was quite a change from the first Comic Relief, which had been more identifiably alternative, in that it was associated more exclusively with the newer generation of comics. Thus the field of alternative comedy opened up a division within the field of broadcast comedy whose force was, however, quickly neutralised and resolved through the absorption of alternative comedy into the mainstream.

How does The Late, Late Breakfast Show, being broadcast in the period when alternative comedy was in full swing, fit into this development? For this programme, the alternative is less a external categorisation, than an internal strategy, a structuring principle. There is a sense that the audience are somehow outside a vaguely conceptualised 'establishment', a sense that the show is doing peculiar, wild, exciting things that normal programmes don't dare to do. The reference to imagined detractors is absolutely persistent throughout the show, and it needs remembering that in fact the show was extremely popular, and that in fact there was very little criticism of it. This device is needed to inscribe the idea of alternativism in the show, given that in fact the show was generally perceived not as controversial, but as mainstream entertainment. Thus, it as though certain aspects of alternative comedy are incorporated into the show – spontaneity, a sense of danger, pushing through the limits of politeness, association with a youth lifestyle. It tries to brings something of the excess of alternative comedy to a mainstream audience - the rudeness, the vibrancy - but without the characteristics that would preclude a general audience - notably the political content and the swearing. In relation to Bakhtin's conception of carnival, it is the capacity to represent the people's unofficial truth that is most notably absent in the Late, Late Breakfast Show – authority is not challenged or brought down. Thus, the show finds a way of holding on to the acceptable characteristics of the new youth humour, and losing the characteristics that might alienate a mass audience, or attract criticism of the show.

The field of light entertainment in Britain (and that of America) has shown an ability since the war to assimilate a whole succession of waves of new styles presenting themselves as sub-cultures, initially identified with a youth audience. What is at stake is the integration of these youth audiences into a general audience and the neutralisation of the perceived threat behind these attitudes. This is not to argue that these so-called sub-cultures in fact post any political threat - this has been effectively refuted by cultural analysts who have demonstrated the role of these activities in relation to the distraction and containment of young people's energy and discontent.[1] Instead, it is to recognise the move in entertainment towards maximising its audience, and successfully appealing to a broad and diverse range of social groups. By incorporating these new styles, the culture industries gain new consumers.
It is interesting to note that Edmonds himself first came to the BBC through an earlier attempt to exploit the popularity of a subculture. The introduction of Radio One, the pop music station, was a reaction to the success of the illegal commercial pirate radio stations that provided a pop service, a process that also compares to the introduction of commercial television that I have already discussed. A major difference between these two processes, however, was that, as the small pirate radios were (unlike ITV) catering to a fairly specific market, the BBC were now forced to compete specifically on the basis of a youth 'subculture', and it is commonly accepted that Radio One was based on the pirates in terms of content and style. Edmonds was one of the many independent DJs (he worked with Radio Luxembourg) who was employed by the BBC as part of this development.

This whole process resulted in pop music having a stable and consistent presence on the BBC, on Radio One, but also, and increasingly, on television (the significance of this is that the BBC was increasingly perceived as popular). This was, of course, long since complete by the time the Late, Late Breakfast Show was broadcast. The Late, Late Breakfast Show, one of the programmes central to Grade's attempt to further popularise the BBC service, is caught on a cross–section between this need for a universal appeal, and the desire to represent itself as being in some way

alternative, belonging to the 'new' comedy. This difficulty can be related to Rojek's explanation of the difference between carnival – characterised by Bakhtin's universalism – and the specialisation characteristic of modern leisure practices. It is as though entertainment represents a carnivalesque impulse within the field of culture which, in the case of The Late, Late Breakfast Show, responds to the specialisation of alternative comedy, recuperating it within consensual entertainment, with its need for universal appeal. It has to ally itself with EastEnders (which is mentioned twice in the programme I look at here) and Wogan, but also with Saturday Live.

The programme's success in doing this becomes more evident if we look at Trick or Treat, a quiz show compered by Mike Smith – Noel Edmonds co–host in the Breakfast Show – that was broadcast two years later in late 1988 and early 1989. This show owes a lot to the Breakfast Show, but contrived to ally itself a little more directly with the "alternative" scene, by using Julian Clary as a co–host. The presence of Clary, at this point coming very much from the alternative comedy circuit, openly gay, and relying heavily on an extremely explicit and suggestive camp comedy, meant that this show was identified much more clearly with a rather specialised "alternative" audience. In this show there is in fact a very clear conflict between Smith and Clary – Clary is willing to be far more daring in his comedy than Smith, who is left rather desperately trying to keep the programme in the arena of mainstream entertainment (on many occasions his discomfort with Clary's outspokenly gay humour was plain). The show itself did not achieve a mainstream success, but gained something of a cult status, and enough popularity within a specialised audience to lead to Clary's own show Sticky Moments, which ran successfully for a number of years, identified very clearly as an "alternative" show.

It is clear that, for Noel Edmonds Late, Late Breakfast Show, this was to be avoided at all costs, but nevertheless it does require that its audience perceive it as daring. Its association with alternative comedy is problematic in that it wants to avoid an oppositional stance for fear of alienating its large audience. The problem that the programme faces, and that (we might suggest) is faced by popular mainstream

entertainment as a whole, lies in creating a universal text, given the specialisation that is characteristic of modern culture, specialised interests being antithetical to the carnivalesque nature of entertainment.

The nature of the programme's alternativism, then, is rigidly delimited: the show tightly encloses its audience – they tend to be a fairly specific group, and they must conform to an even more precise consensus in terms of how they speak and act in the programme. Thus, they appear to be straight, clean, optimistic young men and women, of no particular political outlook, and generally bearing middle class accents and a general sense of affluence. Most fundamentally, everyone is expected to join in the tone of carefree, frivolous wackiness. Echoing Bakhtin's carnival, it appears that anything can be said or done, as long as it isn't serious. It is as though there is a game in progress whose rules everybody – even Paul McCartney – is familiar with, and can be relied on to join in, if called upon to do so.

The alternativism of the show is simply a license to go a little further, to be more playful and wacky, than other television comedy. This is a major difference between The Late, Late Breakfast Show and alternative comedy proper (such as Saturday Night Live, which was on air during the same period as the Breakfast Show), whose shock tactics tended to stress its differences (in terms of political outlook) from mainstream entertainment. Thus, the show is heavily marked by a familiar strategy of traditional entertainment – jokes that poke fun at sexual deviance, ethnicity, anyone who is too wacky. The Mr Puniverse competition produces humour by constructing an idea of the abnormal man who is objectified as funny because he doesn't measure up to 'us' – he has no strength, no capacity or ability. The objector at the beginning of the programme is similarly funny on the understanding that militancy is uncool and stupid. This structuring opposition between the normal and the abnormal is more directly inscribed in the programme by the polarity between its two presenters. While Edmonds has the function of presiding over the programme's excesses, his own normality is very firmly stressed: it is from this position that his jokes about the sexually precocious Samantha, or the sexually inadequate Mr Puniverse competitors,

are funny. Smith, on the other hand, is constructed as not just temporarily involved in a 'wacky' programme, a normal man in an upside–down world, but as a clown–type figure in himself. It is clear that this construction of Smith is tied in with his subordinate role in the programme. Interestingly, Trick or Treat is based on a similar relationship between main host and co-host, with Clary playing the subordinate role and Smith becoming the representative of normality.

As entertainment, then, The Late, Late Breakfast Show holds out an implication that the programme is for everyone. The first edition of the final run of the show, broadcast on 4th October 1986, for example, included film of the current leaders of each of the major political parties, each saying to camera: "Watch The Late, Late Breakfast Show – you'll love it!". This implication that the show is enjoyed by everybody, and is universally acceptable, is in conflict with the continually expressed sense that the show is generally disapproved of, but the construction of this impression of disapproval is crucial in order for the show to be able to present itself as wild and reckless.

The programme, in fact, opens up a space that projects an image of being subject to no regulations – instead there is an 'over the top' feeling throughout the programme, a sense that anything goes, and anything can happen. This promise of a carnivalesque freedom is constantly affirmed, and there is a sense throughout that the programme is unpredictable and risky, constantly daring to go a little bit further. It can be seen as a text that sets up a completely safe space within which danger is contained – language and behaviour constantly threatening to go a little too far, to become a little too silly.

The Late, Late Breakfast Show is deeply rooted in vulgarity, both in that at times it's whole raison d'etre appears to be to set up the inclusion of rude or nonsensical material, but also in that it clearly contrives to remain generally socially acceptable to a mainstream audience at all times. Thus, it is caught in the paradox of

vulgarity - trying to be but never letting itself be outrageous, remaining under tight control but projecting the image of being out of control.

This is immediately evident in terms of the language – the production of lavatorial jokes, and nonsensical 'silliness' forms a large part of the work of the text. Another aspect of this is the refusal to allow any kind of passivity or distance on the part of the studio audience, and to an extent the television spectator also. In fact, it is as though the difference between the two is blurred. Aiming to break down the individuated nature of television spectatorship, it can be seen as a text that aims to draw the spectator into the text in as direct a way as possible. I would suggest that this is just an extreme example of a characteristic of television entertainment in general, which attempts to create the illusion of a carnivalesque, shared experience, relying on the immediacy of television – the effect of which is not wholly dependent on the show being live – and the inscription of the studio audience within the text through a laughter track.

The Late, Late Breakfast Show goes a lot further than this. In this show, one indication of this is the inclusion of live phone calls to spectators in their homes. The unpredictability of this was taken further in later episodes, where phone calls were made 'blind' – the studio audience selecting a phone number at random, which was then rung by Edmonds (baffling those who were not familiar with the programme and who received a call).

So the programme is characterised by an attempt to create a relationship between viewer and text which is more interactive, which is more than one of straightforward spectatorship. In association with this, the show, despite being a television programme, aims to deny the viewing conditions of the medium, and aims to somehow go beyond the domestic. It can almost be seen as an attempt to reverse the shift from active participation to spectatorship that accompanied the development of a culture industry.

This same impulse was taken one stage further again in the more recent Noel

Edmonds' show House Party, which superceded The Late, Late Breakfast Show in popularity. One of the regular weekly features of this show was "NTV" ("Noel's television"), which targets a specific spectator by arrangement with his or her family, a camera crew being hidden in the house, one camera fixed in the television itself, and the spectator suddenly being brought into the body of the text itself from his or her own home.

And this is precisely the strategy around the stunts in The Late, Late Breakfast Show. Despite the vetting of potential "Whirly Wheelers" that took place, the show aims to suggest that the choice is left to chance. The language used around the stunts teases in an essentially comic way around the danger involved. It is as though the stunts using (semi–) randomly chosen members of the public – which each week form the climax of the show – serve two functions. On the one hand there are textual strategies that involve a serious build up of tension, for example information on the training and that this is the first time a member of the public has done the stunt, and the device (common to escapology–type stunts since at least the days of Houdini) of the time beyond which it is declared to be safe being exceeded. But combined with this is a suggestion that the stunt has not been responsibly set up, and that what happens is beyond anyone's control. Thus, jokes about whether any skill is involved, about giving him a "right roasting", and around what "we're going to do to you". "We're gonna lock him up inside there and then set fire to him." "Oh good!". Perhaps more remarkable, given the eventual fate of the show, is Edmonds' statement that next week's potential Whirly Wheelers are willing to "have their lives put at risk". This language does not really aim at deflating the tension – it is more to do with a comic demonstration that Edmonds is reckless, not in control.

Thus the programme presents itself as irresponsible and playful in its employment of this kind of stunt. The stunts are the epitome of carnivalesque freedom and vulgarity. Both elements are dangerous, and the show contrives to retain them both, while also retaining its mainstream appeal. In order to do this, it is essential that the show be seen as harmless, as just entertainment. It appears that the degree of faith by the audience in the safety of television was such that this kind of device could be employed without anyone believing that there was any actual danger to the members of the public, despite the emphatic way in which the programme insists that anything could happen. The danger of the carnivalesque is not believed. The significance of Michael Lush's death is that it represents a moment where this illusion of risk, so central to the programme, in fact was realised. The programme works by setting up a safe space – that of entertainment – within with a dangerous celebrational impulse – the freedom and strength of carnival – is contained. Thus the show continually threatens to go a little too far. The embarrassment surrounding the accident lies precisely in the fact that the promise of its occurrence was made so frequently, and so lightly, in the programme.

CONCLUSION

In this conclusion, I will briefly summarise the thesis, before finishing with my closing arguments.

In Chapter One I was primarily concerned with unpackaging the concept of entertainment. To begin with, I examined the word itself, and looked at the development of a new discourse around culture, taking place during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This discourse allowed the construction of a polarity between two unquestioned categories: on the one hand "Art", on the other "entertainment"; on the one hand "respectability", on the other "vulgarity". Following from this, I reviewed the ability of film studies to engage critically with the concept of entertainment, and made the claim that to a large extent the concept has remained unproblematised, despite the central importance it has for a discipline devoted to the study of popular entertainment forms. I referred to Richard Dyer's work as a notable exception to this, with his reading of entertainment as a space wherein utopian sensibilities are given expression within a capitalist society, and his analysis of the capacities of and constraints on these sensibilities in Hollywood musicals. Finally, in this first chapter, I opened out the theoretical boundaries of the work a little, aiming to suggest the possibility of looking at the identification that entertainment forms appear to offer to the spectator. The formation of the concept of entertainment within the field of popular culture coincided with the establishment of the working class as a meaningful identity. However, entertainment resists defining its audience as working class, and in aiming to address itself to everybody, provides a space where we temporarily ignore our social identity.

In the second chapter I explored the relationship between culture and social class, and used the Marxist sociology of Pierre Bourdieu in order to demonstrate the classed nature of legitimate culture. Art is seen as having the political function of maintaining class difference, and justifying middle class hegemony, through its capacity to "distinguish" the cultured. Noting Bourdieu's refusal to grant any similar political function to low culture, I posited a theory of entertainment, seeing it as relying on the presence of what I refer to as the vulgar. In order to explain my usage of this term, I took access to Richard Hoggart's notion of "debunking", and expanded this into an explanation of vulgarity as a concept that illuminates the political stakes in relation to entertainment. I gave a detailed analysis of a sequence from a George Formby film in order to demonstrate this point. Finally, in this chapter, I looked at the place of vulgarity and triviality in discourses around broadcasting, both in relation to the debates around the introduction of commercial television into Britain in the fifties and the resistance to the lack of cultural worth shown by their programmes, and in relation to Cardiff's analysis of the development of a specific form of entertainment, the middle brow, and its development in British broadcasting as an area of culture representing a middle ground between pure art and pure amusement, which, in dispensing with cultural worth, embraces the vulgar.

The final chapter of the thesis aimed to look more closely at the textual strategies characteristic of entertainment. In order to do this, I began with a reminder of Bakhtin's category of the carnivalesque. I explained the unique value of Bakhtin's work in that he grants a historical specificity to the forms of popular festivity he looks at, as well as sketching out a number of so-called carnivalesque elements which are adopted as textual strategies by Rabelais. I also suggest that Bakhtin's conception of this historical carnival's radical nature is somewhat over–optimistic and mythologised

in any case, and that we may doubt the historical existence of the "revolutionary" carnival he expounds. Nevertheless, this idealised picture of carnival is extremely useful, and in looking at the differences between entertainment and carnival, I suggest that entertainment texts can be seen as attempting to contain the strategies of carnival in a relatively 'safe' form, in the context of a historical shift towards privatisation and individuation of our leisure activities, as described by Rojek. Finally, I explore this point in relation to a television programme of the late eighties, which is heavily marked by vulgarity. Analysis of the programme demonstrates the specific constraints and boundaries that surround the attempt of television entertainment to contain vulgarity, and create an illusion of the carnivalesque.

We do not live in a carnivalesque society. That is, our society is no sense characterised by intense and regular moments of drastic social upheaval, contained rigidly within specific time periods, perceived as harmless or even fostered as useful by the state, and in fact posing no threat to the social structure. Our cultural practice is everyday, rather than exceptional, and it is entertaining, rather than rebellious or anarchistic. Instead of bringing us together, our cultural forms tend to individuate and domesticate us, as we have seen in Rojek's analysis.

However, as we have seen, modern light entertainment attempts to resist this process, playing a game of trying to pass itself of as carnivalesque to a greater or lesser degree. Entertainment is an area within the general field of culture that aims to hold onto some traces of carnival, to demonstrate some capacity for unifying us by giving us access to at least a sense of community, and to allow us some mild degree of freedom and licence, and a space from which to laugh at authority.

Instead of hinting at a revolutionary inversion of social hierarchies, entertainment offers us a temporary respite from them. In contrast to carnival's

universalising capacity, that addresses itself to society as a whole, breaking down our social positions and identities for a brief period before returning us to them, entertainment has to operate within a complex cultural arena within which we articulate our class positions and social identity precisely through our leisure practice, and our aesthetic choices. Within a society based upon competition, our recreation has been mobilised in the endless push toward upward mobility. We distinguish ourselves through our cultural choices, marking ourselves off from others, allying ourselves with particular groups, rather than with the people as a whole.

However, within this cultural field, light entertainment represents a space that refuses this capacity, by disallowing itself the characteristic of aesthetic worth. This remains the case despite the increasing fluidity with which entertainment texts are re-read as worthy of cultural note. This fluidity has been a characteristic of the flexibility of legitimate culture since the development of a discourse around aesthetics. Thus, Shakespeare's plays were first written and produced in a context where they were consumed more as amusement rather than as providing any sort of cultural capital for the spectators, and in this respect their status has gone through a similar transformation to the early films of Chaplin. Following the establishment of a discourse opposing art to entertainment, the transition of particular texts and particular entertainers from the field of entertainment to that of legitimate culture has been a constant feature. I would argue that this transition involves losing the capacity for vulgarity, since these works now claim cultural merit for themselves.

During the twentieth century, this transition has affected film and television dramatically, both of which media can now be seen to have their own quasi-literary canon, and this development can be related to the development of Film Studies and Television Studies as academic disciplines. However, despite this potentiality for

entertainment texts to gain cultural respect, and become regarded as worthy of critical appraisal, there always remain some texts that are seen as purely a means of passing time, purely an amusement. Underlying this is a strategy whereby light entertainment sells us community as a commodity, sells us our sense of belonging in a society within which feel increasingly individuated and in competition, sells us contained moments of chaos and rebelliousness in a state within which we have been rendered docile. Within the construction of community offered by entertainment, for a brief period as spectators we respond together, we laugh at the same things and express the same values. I have used the concept of vulgarity as a shorthand, here, to express something of the complexity and the force of this project underlying entertainment.

In this thesis, we have looked at the ways in which the modern concept of entertainment has developed and been mobilised within the historical period associated with the industrial revolution, and the urbanisation of the proletariat. I have aimed to trace the history and the logic within the development of a particular area of Anglo-American culture - that is to say, the development of mass entertainment as an institution within the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and within that development to look at the specificity of mass entertainment as opposed both to respectable culture, and on the other hand to genres that identify themselves as "sub-cultures" in that they embody attitudes that exclude a mainstream audience. For example obscene, political, or angry content that may be associated with a specific audience in relation to class, race, gender, or age.

I have explained the ways in which institutions of mass entertainment have aimed to gain a broad appeal. Entertainment texts have had to find ways of including vulgar material, without alienating portions of this broad audience. Vulgarity needs to be rendered sufficiently harmless, trivialised sufficiently or rendered as enough of a

joke that it is not seen as threatening. This delicate balance means that entertainment texts are frequently taking a risk - will they include enough vulgarity to be entertaining, or will they be overly vulgar, making them unacceptable? The industries associated most closely with light entertainment, then, have a general aim of creating a product that is acceptable for all of us. At its most ambitious, entertainment strives to set up a neutral space for any and every spectator to occupy, regardless of class status, gender, nationality.

While broadcasting increasingly has the capacity to offer a diversity of specialised programmes, we can see this general trend towards the mainstream in the careers of many successful British comedians from a wide political spread - for example, in comics starting out within the minority interest of early "alternative" comedy with a clearly identified left-wing slant, such as Ben Elton or Alexei Sayle, as well as in comics with a background in the traditional British men's clubs, such as Jim Davidson or Bernard Manning, with deliberately bigoted material. With all of these comics, the shift from a more or less specific audience, towards a more general one - and in particular as they have moved from stage to broadcasting - has involved either a toning down of their more identifiably minority-interest material (such as political jokes that assume a particular left-wing perspective in the audience, or jokes readily identified with contempt for particular social groups), or a broadening of what is considered acceptable by society as a whole (as for instance the inclusion of greater swearing or violence, or political humour).

This movement towards light entertainment is an embracing of vulgarity, which articulates a view that underneath everything, we are all the same. Through vulgarity, entertainment boasts its own lack of sophistication and culture, putting on an appearance of universality and naturalness that is in fact a lie - like any other area of

cultural practice vulgarity has its own history and is no more a natural unmediated expression of our wants than any other form of culture. Tracing the history of entertainment in Britain over the last two centuries gives us a picture of how arbitrary and historically determined entertainment in fact is - how closely tied to a particular society, with its own economic structure, its own class system, its own mode of subjectivity.

Low culture is not a term or a concept that we can dispense with. In fact it is vital for our enjoyment and for our critical understanding of texts such as television game shows, musicals, and comedy in our society. These texts are not categorised as low culture after the event, their position within the cultural arena is not accidental or post-textual - it is inscribed in entertainment texts, which are underpinned by a strategy whereby they oppose themselves to culture. Through vulgarity, low culture colludes in its own subservient position, celebrating it, parading it, blatantly ignoring the option of being respectable, without, however, completely allowing itself to abandon all restraint and wholeheartedly embrace a real rebelliousness. The laughter proper to light entertainment is not Sloterdijk's kynical and celebrational laughter throwing itself open to abandon, and functioning as a moment of resistance - it is a contained and collusive laughter, wanting to look rebellious, but concerned not to risk being considered completely improper.

Thus, in texts of British light entertainment, such as the films and songs of George Formby, or Noel Edmonds television programmes, it is the marked, but also the markedly mild, rudeness of the content which we recognise as vulgar, rather than obscene. Their "naughtiness", their sense of transgression, seeks to never allow them to be perceived as too explicit or chaotic to risk them ceasing to be broadly acceptable and gaining a mass, and diverse, audience. This attempt to negotiate a space within

which vulgarity can be harmlessly contained does not always work. We have looked in detail at an accidental breakdown of this containment in the demise of the Late, Late Breakfast Show . However, moments of such leakage, where texts fall away from being mainstream entertainment can be a deliberate strategy - for instance in the area of alternative comedy with comics such as Alexei Sayle (at least in his early work), or with club comics such as Bernard Manning, both of whom have deliberately sought to alienate a portion of the audience, and to speak for and on behalf of specific social groups.

Yet despite such moments, mass entertainment in general is based around an imperative of containment, according to which entertainment texts are express an opposition to respectability yet render this harmless and unthreatening. As we have seen in our analysis of The Late, Late Breakfast Show, the vulgar is expressed precisely through this textually inscribed opposition to respectability.

As Bourdieu demonstrates, cultural value is not an objective concept. Instead, it is a term highly charged with political meaning. It is not that entertainment texts have no aesthetic value, but that it is not in their interests to display this value openly. As spectators in the field of entertainment, we want to believe that we are not working, or discriminating - that we are simply being entertained. It is the space within our cultural life where we are allowed to believe this is purely for our pleasure, because we gain no prestige from our consumption of these texts. Therefore, cultural distinction is a discourse that it is in the interests of both high and low areas of cultural practice to foster.

However, entertainment frequently threatens to lay bare the pretence of cultural value. It has a capacity to mock or to ignore aesthetic pretension, and this can move toward deconstructing the concept of distinction between high and low culture. This

can create a tension where entertainment wants to have its cake and eat it - both to deconstruct and dismiss the field of high culture, representing the whole cultural arena as indistinguishable and equal, but also to boast its difference, its own freedom from aesthetic value. Vulgarity is a deliberate strategy, on the part of entertainment, to distinguish itself from what is recognised as high culture - to represent itself as purely for our amusement, as opposed to what is seen as artistically valuable.

Entertainment is based on setting out an opposition between the respectable and the vulgar, and locating itself within this. Its complex task is to contain enough vulgarity to be entertaining, feel liberating, and demonstrate freedom from constraint, but to remain respectable enough to be widely acceptable to a mainstream audience, and to not be perceived as threatening or subversive. Thus, entertainment is placed in a mid-way point between outright vulgarity, and purely respectable culture. Pornography, or a strip show, or a boxing match might not be light entertainment - an ice show or a wrestling match might be. Entertainment can only be identified in social context, dependant for example on the degree to which sexual or scatological or violent content is generally socially acceptable.

The media of film and television broadly speaking have fitted in with the trend toward ever greater privatisation of our entertainment forms. Thus there is a very clear contrast in the context within which projected film was first used as an entertainment form - for example in fairgrounds and music halls, and relying on a high level of participation, interaction and rowdiness by the audience, and a comparative lack of distance between the screen and the viewer[1] - and the theatrical form it quickly developed, relying on a quiet audience in fixed seating, giving attention exclusively to the screen (ideally) for sustained periods of time.

With broadcasting, entertainment has become a domestic rather than a public event, and has become more available to us on an even more everyday level, with the expansion of viewing and listening hours to the present point. To the extent that television and radio have dominated our cultural practice since the war, we have become more separate and individuated as entertainment spectators, being entertained as individuals or in small groups.

In this context, vulgarity is something of a pretence. We are offered community and a sense of shared experience in the context of its absence. To paraphrase Adorno, it is the promise of belonging standing in for belonging itself. Entertainment offers us something it cannot deliver. As spectators, it is our task to accept this promise in good faith.

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